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## SILVER SAM;

OR,

### The Mystery of Deadwood City.

BY COLONEL DELLE SARA.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE LONE GRAVE ON THE PRAIRIE.

"The crow makes wing to the rocky wood."

NORTHWARD goes the trail from Laramie's Fort; straight as the crow flies, the adventuring gold-seekers have cut a way through the trackless wilderness direct to the Black Hills, the new Eldorado of the West, erst the home and hunting-grounds of the painted, feather-bedizened savage, great Nature's natural son.

What recked it to the desperate men, turning their backs upon the comforts of civilization, and seeking to woo new fortune in an untamed land, that the fierce red barbarians had sharpened afresh the scalping-knife, dug new pigments from mother earth's bosom to adorn their visages with the hideous tints of war, and had determined to dispute every inch of soil and bar the advance of the gold-seekers with new-made graves?

The same lust that lured the world-seeking Genoese across the stormy seas—that carried bold Cortez and desperate Pizarro in frail shallops to an unknown shore, hurried them on.

The chink of gold has ever been the sweetest music to mortal ears since the world began. And a golden dream it was that led the pushing, daring crowd on, clear into the Black Hills, despite the Sioux savages, despite the soldiers of the United States Government, despite the phantoms hunger and thirst, who marched with them by day and crouched by their camp-fires at night.

On through the pathless wilderness the gold-maddened throng had marched—strong men and weak—the veteran gold-seekers—the spruce clerk from the city counters—the hard-handed farmer's son, fresh from the plow—the sturdy mechanic—all lured from their homes by the wondrous stories told of rich golden deposits in the Black Hills, patiently waiting for pick and shovel—the advent of the conquering white man, to make wealthy forever the lucky mortals who should stumble upon the hiding-place of the treasures.

'Tis the fabulous region of the unknown that attracts.

The past we know—alas! sometimes too well! the present we can guess at, but of the future

we dream, and to the dream, bright hope—heaven's best gift to short-sighted mortals—ever lends a golden tinge.

And on the track of the golden dreamers—who but followed the subtle instinct, strong in the breast of man since the early ages, which has ever bade the adventuring spirit journey to the West, the land of the setting sun—came the tribe whose "totems" are the wolf and the vulture, whose chosen weapon is John Barley-corn's distilled juice.

Hard on the heels of the honest sons of toil came the outcasts of civilization.

The men upon whose shoulders an outraged law had laid its iron gripe, who traded with the savage because their own race had driven them forth.

Who speaks of the days of '49 in the California land as of an episode that has passed away never to return?

Mankind is still the same, whether on the far Pacific slope, amid the bleak hills of White Pine, the rocky ravines of the Apache land by the Rio Gila, or in the northern Black Hills, where the Big Horn mountains cut the sky and frown down upon pleasant valleys.

And of this strange multitude—good men and bad, strong men and weak, the honest toiler, the wily 'sharp,' the bum—ever in the advance of civilization, as was his name—



FAST OVER THE PRAIRIE RACED THE PURSUED AND PURSUERS; THE STRANGE HORSEMAN TURNED IN HIS SADDLE AND LAUGHED IN DEFIANCE.



sake in advance of Sherman's legions when the federal chief marched through George's fair land, from where Atlanta's ruins smoked to a gloomy sky, sad to witness war's desolation, to Savannah's sun smiling upon the fairest city in all our own dear Southern land—we shall write—shall tell a tale so strange that foreign eyes shall marvel as they read, and wonder what magic there is in this Western strand that from its soil have sprung a race of men who, all unheralded and unsung, have performed deeds of valor that can put to shame the Grecian heroes, whose exploits live forever in immortal verse.

Easy is it now to follow the trail leading from the iron way of the Union Pacific road to the Black Hill metropolis, Deadwood City, the "magic" town that, like Aladdin's palace, seemed to grow in a single night.

The way is marked by civilization's signs.

The mangled remains of broken wagons, empty tins, bearing the legends "Delaware tomatoes," "fresh peaches," etc., smashed whisky bottles, with here and there the white bones of some animal unable to withstand the fatigue of the march.

Nor was there wanting sign of gentle woman's presence, for here and there strange devices of wire and tape, firmly bound together, bird-cage fashion, affrighted the wandering great white wolf or his more sneaky brother, the snarling coyote.

It was night, and the moon shone bright as day. Over the barren plain toward the north a horseman was riding.

A man of powerful build, mounted upon a stout Indian pony. Over his shoulder was cast the blanket of the Indian, and as the rapid motion displaced its folds it revealed the hunting-shirt and leggings common to the red-men.

A broad-brimmed felt hat was pulled down over his brows, and from under it escaped long black locks, coarse and straight.

A frontier scout, a mile off, would have had no hesitation, from these signs, in pronouncing the rider to be an Indian, and if he had examined more closely he would have "guessed," from the fashion of his moccasins and the manner in which his leggings were cut and trimmed, that he was a chief of the Sioux nation, and no common warrior either, or the gray wolf-tails would not have dangled at his heels, a mark of distinction that only a chief of note can wear.

The hour of midnight was close at hand, and both horse and rider seemed wearied.

The pony flagged in his springy "lope," and the rider sat less straight in the saddle.

A short distance ahead on the prairie a collection of tin cans, scattered embers and other evidences of civilization, promiscuously distributed about a small clump of cottonwood trees, told that the shelter of the timber had been sought by emigrants, Black Hill-ward bound.

The horseman rode straight for the prairie island, for so these scattered clumps of timber are generally termed by the frontiersmen.

Arriving under the trees he dismounted from the pony, picketed him to one of the trunks by a lariat, and then took a circle about the little clump of timber, apparently to note the surroundings—a common precaution with one used to the wild life of the frontier, where a new-comer is as often apt to prove a foe as a friend.

Afar off as the eye could reach the plain extended in an almost unbroken line, except at the north, where the shadowy peaks of the Big Horn Mountains cut the sky.

The horseman made a half-circle of the timber and then suddenly stopped; a little mound of earth some ten paces off, surmounted by a rude head-board, attracted his attention.

It was evidently a grave.

Some weak traveler had fallen by the way and to the rich virgin soil of the prairie the mortal remains had been committed, and in order to mark the spot some careful hand had placed the rude head-board.

And rude enough it was, indeed.

Just the lid of a cracker-box; one end sharpened and pushed down into the soil, and upon the other a rude inscription was cut.

JULIET OAKS,

Aged 30 y's.

Hardly had the stranger read the inscription when a good, round Anglo-Saxon oath came from his lips, and in tremulous agitation he knelt by the side of the grave.

"Juliet dead!" he cried, speaking as no red chief ever spoke yet; "my search then for her is ended, but my child—my little one—where is she? and where, too, is the author of all this terrible misery? The grave hides her from my bitter words, death cancels the account, but my child—is she in the Black Hills with him, the man whose face even I do not know? but I'll hunt him down if it takes to my dying day."

And the big round moon witnessed the oath.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAGIC CITY.

"This castle has a pleasant seat."

A LIVELY place, indeed, is Deadwood City—no town in all the Black Hills to compare with it—the "Magic City," as some of its inhabitants are fond of terming it. More lively

by night than by day, though; for then the miners flock in from the mountain gulches, and the one street of the town assumes a festival appearance.

Plenty of saloons are there, and a theater, too, and a concert-saloon, so the hard-handed miners do not lack for amusement.

Right in the center of the town is an object, which truly is one of the wonders of the city.

No need for the citizen to call the attention of a stranger to it, for every new-comer to Deadwood City speedily discovers it for himself, and for a few moments poses in open-mouthed wonder before it.

And yet it was only a simple sign affixed to the front of a small store—a one-story shanty, pretty near the center of the town.

The sign read:

MERCEDES KIRKLEY

CIGARS, TOBACCO, AND FANCY GOODS.

The only store in the young metropolis of the Black Hills kept by a woman.

Therefore was it a wonder.

Women were not over-plentiful in Deadwood, and, what few there were, the most of them were either old and weather-beaten, or else scandal attached itself to their reputation.

But Mercedes, the keeper of the little shop, was both young and pretty, fresh as a daisy, and as lady-like as any city belle or fashion's queen.

Four short months before the time of which we write the girl had arrived in Deadwood, alone and unprotected. She had taken up her quarters at the hotel, had occasioned much speculation, which did not abate when she engaged a carpenter, had the shanty store erected, and one morning quietly commenced business.

Trade thrived with her, for all the town flocked with eager curiosity to behold the daring woman.

The town was disappointed, for Mercedes was not at all the sort of girl that Deadwood expected to see.

A bold, forward creature, full of talk and "go," a bustling advocate of woman's rights, Deadwood had thought to behold in Mercedes, and Deadwood was woefully disappointed.

The girl was modest and retiring; waited upon her customers with a shy smile, and bore herself in such a manner that even the roughest customer, from the gulches of the Big Horn, thought twice before venturing to bandy words or coarse jests with her.

She was a lady, and the worst rough in the town instinctively was awed into respect.

Pretty as a picture, too, was the girl, with a face as fresh and fair as a bright summer's morning; great gray-blue eyes, tender and true; a face perfect oval in shape, clear red and white in color, and as frank and honest in its look as ever a girlish face has dared to be since the Creation day. Light and graceful in form, always neatly attired, and with a pleasant smile ever on her features, it was little wonder that all the town swore that she hadn't an equal west of the Missouri.

It was but natural, under the circumstances, that the pretty shop-keeper should have plenty of suitors.

As General Baltimore Bowie, the great oracle of the town, was wont to remark, in his moments of confidence:

"Be gad, sir, she's a devilish fine girl, me boy!"

And what the funny old Maryland lawyer didn't know about women wasn't worth knowing.

But, one and all sighed in vain; the laughing girl evaded all attempts at love-making; and if the ardent swain became too persistent in his endeavors to win her favor, she would quietly call the almond-eyed Chinese, who assisted her in taking care of the store, to attend to the customer, and withdraw into the inner apartment, into whose sacred precincts no suitor yet had been either bold or lucky enough to penetrate.

Naturally enough, there were three or four men in the town who seemed to be more highly favored by the charming Mercedes than the rest.

Possibly it was because these few had sense enough not to make their attentions too apparent, and did not turn love-making into persecution.

The girl was only human, and, of course, with her cheerful nature, liked society, and of her own sex there were few with whom she cared to associate.

It is easy to describe the favored few who were permitted to bask in the sunlight of Miss Kirkley's smiles—"Mercedes pets," as the envious miners had named them—"Mercedes' Own," as the bluff and hearty General Bowie facetiously termed them.

First on the list came the general himself, a hearty and well-preserved man of fifty, the leading lawyer of the town, full of the stately politeness so common to the old-time Southerner—chivalry's own son; much given to extravagant compliment, and somewhat disposed to relate extravagant stories—himself the hero of the tale; a hard drinker, and an inveterate smoker; a good lawyer, but totally unreliable on account of his propensity for strong drink; but this little fact didn't make much difference, for Deadwood, at the time of which we write, was not particular as to a hair.

Rumor said that the general had been forced into exile on account of a little difference of opinion between himself and the other officers of a certain small country bank with which he had been connected, regarding a little sum of money. In fine, the general had used the bank's money as if it had been his own, and when called to account, rather than have any quarrel about so small a matter as a few thousand dollars with men with whom he had been brought up from childhood—the general was nothing if not pathetic—he had quiet-



ly improved the midnight hours, and fled to the wilds of the far West.

But in his cups the general was wont to hint, mysteriously, that there was a lady in the case, and that if he chose to speak, he could unfold a tale calculated to make the eyes of the listener bulge forth in horror.

Blunt and open-spoken men said that the general was an "infernal old fraud," but who did the tongue of envy ever spare?

Next on the list we must place Major Lysander Germaine, the commander of the little United States post planted on the hillside to overawe the hostile Sioux, who were fearfully enraged at the daring excursion of the white-skins into the favorite hunting-grounds of their great nation.

Major Germaine was a man of uncertain age. Thirty-three he claimed to be; forty-three was the more likely figure.

A man little above the medium size, stoutly built, florid in face, brown hair and side whiskers, with a reddish tinge, uncertain gray, cat-like eyes, a peculiar military strut, and an imperious way, common to some of our military chaps who, in the martinet, are apt to forget the man.

The kind of officer who, in the line of battle, are pretty certain to fall with the first fire, shot from behind, the victim of some soldier in their own company who has been irritated by petty tyranny beyond the bounds of endurance.

No fancy sketch this, but stern reality.

No. 3 we will put Elijah Hallowell, "a-son-of-the-State-of-Maine," as he was fond of terming himself—a gaunt, brawny six-footer, a miner who, in common with another, worked one of the most productive claims known for miles around Deadwood.

A popular man was Big Lige, as he was generally termed, for his heart was as big as the head of a flour-barrel—to use the common expression.

And it was strange, too, that Lige should be so popular, for his partner was not. William Jones he called himself; but in the saloons of the town he was always termed "Montana."

Why Jones should be unpopular was a mystery. He was a quiet, sober fellow, minded his own business, and troubled no one. He kept himself to himself though, and shunned society. Noted only was he for one thing—he was the best short-card player that had ever flipped the pasteboards in Deadwood.

In the Big Horn saloon the sharps had picked him up for a greenhorn one night, and, for the first time accepting the banter, he had flaxed the crowd.

No name too bad for William Jones—quiet Montana—the next morning, among all that gang of sharps.

"Gambler, black-leg, and thief!"

But, it was a bold man, after that night's work, who dared Montana to try his luck at poker.

And last on the list comes Thomas Black, the "Deacon," as he was generally termed—the principal store-keeper of the town.

### CHAPTER III.

#### MERCEDES.

"The rich East holds not her peer."

IN Mercedes' store, leaning on the counter, stood Major Germaine, who had just purchased a cigar and was about lighting it. Behind the counter stood the girl herself with her bright, pleasant face, always so cheerful in its smile.

The major lit his cigar, threw away the match, and then his attention was attracted by a tiny bouquet of wild flowers placed in a glass on the little show-case.

"Fond of flowers, Miss Mercedes?" he asked, stooping over and inhaling the odor of the blossoms.

"Oh, yes, very fond of flowers," she answered, her clear voice as cheery and as pleasant as her face.

"Do you know, Miss Mercedes, that I have noticed that up in that west gulch the flowers seem to grow purer and sweeter than anywhere else around the town?"

It was a careless speech, and the major was tapping his leg, listlessly, with the light switch he carried, as he spoke.

A quick, sharp glance the girl cast at his face; evidently her suspicions were aroused.

"Yes?" she said.

"Yes," he replied; "haven't you noticed the fact?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I have."

"And yet you walk up that way very often."

"How do you know I do?" was Miss Mercedes' natural question.

"Oh, a little bird told me," the soldier replied, laughing.

"A very sharp little bird!" The girl was evidently annoyed.

"I am well served, you see."

"How served?"

"Why, my little bird tells me where you go."

"There is no need of a bird to find that out; I would have told you if you had asked me."

"Oh, yes, no doubt!"

"You do not believe me?"

"You wrong me," and the major bowed, gallantly.

"I do not see any reason why I should wish to keep such a simple matter a secret."

"Sometimes trifles light as air betray us into deepest consequences," replied the major, quoting from memory, and quoting wrong as men generally do.

"I don't understand you at all," the girl said, with a shake of her shapely head, so superbly crowned with its heavy coils of golden-brown hair.

"None so blind as those who won't see, Miss Mercedes. The west gulch is a beautiful and most romantic place, and the one particular charm of the scene is the spot where Messrs. Elijah Hallowell and William Jones delve in the earth, seeking golden grains."

"Oh, and I suppose that your little bird told you that I sat down upon a rock and watched them work yesterday for over an hour?" Mercedes asked, sarcastically.

"Exactly one hour and a half by the watch."

"And does your little bird wear a watch?" the girl asked, with a demure smile.

"Yes. Oh! he's a very smart little bird, I tell you! By the way, what charming taste this fellow, Montana, has in arranging flowers. This little spray of green in the midst of those scarlet what-do-you-call-'em, is quite superb," and the soldier bent over the humble blossoms in pretended admiration, but all the while he kept a close watch upon the face of the girl.

The speech did not produce the result anticipated, for the face of the girl did not change in the least.

"I suppose you mean to imply that Mr. Jones—Montana, as you call him—arranged that little bunch of flowers?" she said, quietly.

"Yes, that is about it."

"Well, I'm sure that I can't say whether he did or not."

"With truth?"

The girl drew her slender figure up proudly and looked the soldier full in the eyes.

"Major, if you begin to talk in that way I'll send Ah Hi to wait on you."

Ah Hi was the Chinese whom we have spoken of as acting as man-of-all-work to the pretty shop-keeper.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mercedes, but, hang it all! make some allowance for a fellow!" the major exclaimed, bluntly.

"To drop the bird fiction, I saw Montana—Mister William Jones, to give him the handle he claims here, although the records of some Eastern court undoubtedly give him another; well, I saw him gather the flowers and place them on the rock—I was on the hillside with my gun after game; then I saw you come along, take the flowers and fasten them on your bosom, a place of honor that my costly roses, imported all the way from the East expressly for you, never occupied. Then you walked up the gulch to where he and his companions were at work; you sat on a rock and for over an hour you talked to them."

"And you watched me from the hillside, horridly jealous, eh?" questioned Mercedes, laughing.

"Yes, that is the truth, and confoundedly astonished, too. Why, do you know who and what this Montana is?"

"A very handsome young man," the girl replied, slyly.

"Well, that is all a matter of opinion!" the major exclaimed with a grimace, which clearly indicated that he was not impressed with Mr. Montana's good looks. "To me he looks like a dead man more than anything else with his unnatural paleness and his thin, lantern-jawed face; but, what I meant was, do you know the man's reputation?"

"Yes, I believe so," Mercedes answered, composedly.

"A gambler—a regular card-sharp who lives by his wits, whose days are passed in sleep and nights in robbing greenhorns of their hard-earned money. Ever since the fellow came to town I've been wishing that he'd tackle some man of my company and fleece him."

"Why, what a wish!" the girl exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Then I'd get a chance at him. My command takes in this town. I'd drum-head court-martial him and give him a hundred lashes as a warning to all the rest of the thieving tribe."

"I'm afraid, major, that the citizens wouldn't stand that!" she said.

"Let the chance come, and see how quick I'll improve it!" he exclaimed. "But now, honestly, I am really astonished at your conduct. For the past week I have noticed that this man has kept out of the town; he has avoided you and, by Jove! you take the trouble to hunt him up!"

"If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, you know—" Mercedes said, smiling.

"Mahomet must go to the mountain, eh?"

The girl nodded.

"The fellow won't come to you, and so you go after him."

"How sagacious you are!"

Mercedes did not seem at all disturbed at the discovery the major had made, and was not at all disposed to deny her share in the matter.

"Mercedes, are you in love with the fellow?" Germaine asked, abruptly. "If so, say it, and that ends the matter as far as I am concerned."

"Oh, I don't love him or anybody else," the girl said, wearily. "I don't know the meaning of the word, and I never want to know. Love to me spells misery, want and death. I know that William Jones is not the man's right name, and I'm anxious to find out what it is; if he is the man I think he is—"

"Well?"

"A girl had better walk into her grave than marry him."

"Why then are you anxious to know aught of him?"

"To settle an old account!" came sharply from between the white teeth of the girl. "'Tis not to live only that I came to this wild land."



And then came a sudden exclamation of alarm from the girl's lips. Her eyes had fallen upon two strangers coming down the street.

The major perceived the two at the same moment.

A portly, well-dressed man of middle age and a tall, stylish girl, splendidly dressed.

"Congressman Campbell and his daughter from lower Illinois," he said. "Mort Campbell is as big a rascal as ever went unhung!"

"Even the grave will not hide me from that man!" Mercedes cried, with white lips.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GRAVE GIVES UP ITS DEAD.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,—"

THE express hack from Deadwood to Fort Laramie had started on its trip as usual. Leaving Deadwood at 7 P. M., it made its first halt at 7 in the morning.

For a wonder, on this particular evening of which we write, there was not a single passenger bound south, but there was express matter to go and the United States mail.

Therefore the driver toolled the spirited pair of grays up to the express office, got the express stuff and the mail bag—the Deadwood mail was not a heavy one—and started on his trip southward.

Out of Deadwood's city then rolled the hack and the journey began.

Quite a character was the driver of the coach. He was a little, freckle-faced, red-headed Irishman, by name, Paudeen O'Hoolahan; but, as this appellation was entirely too long and complex to suit the free and easy style of the citizens of Deadwood, some wag had nick-named the jolly Irishman Paddy Pud, the Pud being intended as an abbreviation of Paudeen—and the name had seemed to fit the Hibernian so well that one and all had adopted it, and clear from Laramie up to the Black Hills, O'Hoolahan was always called Paddy Pud.

Small difference it made to the good-natured Irishman, except when he was in liquor, which was not often, and then he indignantly repudiated the nick-name, swore that it was an insult to the blood of the O'Hoolahans, and that he'd have the life of the offender, if he died for it. Strange to relate, with a total disregard for the probabilities on these occasions of wrath, the doughty little Irishman always selected the biggest miner in the room, generally twice as large as himself, to quarrel with, and attacked him with the ferocity of a bulldog; as a natural consequence thereby Paddy generally succeeded in getting a most tremendous whaling, and when he became sober and surveyed his bruises he always bemoaned the evil fortune which led the man of war to attack "a poor b'y who wouldn't harm a worm, bedad!"

Brave as a lion, though, was Paddy, drunk or sober—sure proof of this was that the division of the line over which he drove was reputed to be the most dangerous one between Deadwood and Laramie.

Paddy drove from seven to seven, laid off for the day at the station, and then took the up coach again at night, arriving at Deadwood again in the morning.

It was a rough road from the city to the first station, and more exposed to Indian attacks than any other part of the line.

It was not often though that the red-skins dared to attack the coaches. The hacks were generally well filled with passengers, armed to the teeth, and on two or three occasions the reds had caught a Tartar.

Armed from top to toe was Paddy; behind him on the box was a repeating rifle, and two heavy revolvers were buckled to his side.

So remote was the time of the last Indian attack that Paddy never dreamed of danger as he drove on, merrily humming snatches of odd old Irish airs.

The moon was out round and full and the road was almost as light as by day.

Three hours Paddy had been on the road and some fourteen miles the coach had covered when, in rising out of the deep defile, known far and wide as Bloody Gulch on account of an Indian massacre that had once occurred there, a strange sight met his eyes.

Mounted upon a white horse was a dark figure barring the passage of the road.

The person of the rider was almost entirely concealed by a black cloak, except that the head seemed to be merely a skull surmounted by a dark hat with a peaked crown.

Instinctively the superstitious Irishman pulled up his horses and he felt the hair upon his head rising in terror.

"Holy Moses! what the devil's that?" he muttered.

"Paudeen O'Hoolahan, I have come for you!" said the figure, in strange, hollow tones.

"If it's a trick yer afther, I'll plug a hole through yees!" Paddy cried, in an agony of terror, and catching up his rifle he leveled it at the unknown and pulled the trigger.

For the first time since Paddy had possessed the weapon the rifle missed fire.

Three times the fear-stricken Irishman pulled the trigger, and three times the caps refused to explode.

Then, with unsteady hands, he grasped his revolvers, and they too, refused to perform their office.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the stranger, in sepulchral tones, "from the flames below I come, O'Hoolahan; Satan waits for you!"

And then the stranger threw back the black cloak and a skeleton form appeared beneath.

This was quite enough for Paddy Pud.

With a howl of terror he leaped from the box of the coach and fled toward Deadwood at the top of his speed.

Paddy was not anxious to make the acquaintance of his Satanic majesty just yet.

The short legs of the Irishman soon carried him down into the gulch out of sight, and then the horseman rapidly approached the hack.

From under the driver's seat he drew the mail-bag, nimbly dismounted from his horse, and then proceeded to examine the fastenings of the bag.

He produced a bunch of keys and tried them, one by one, in the lock of the mail-bag.

At last one fit, and, with an exclamation of delight that savored far more of earth than it did of the shades below, he poured the letters out upon the ground.

A motley collection of epistles, and directed in all kinds of hands from the scrawl of the uneducated foreigner to the round, clerkly inscription of the college graduate.

Rapidly, one by one, the mysterious stranger ran the letters over in his hand, examining each superscription closely; it was plain that he sought some particular letter, and believed that he could identify it by the handwriting.

"Not here, not here!" he muttered, as the last of the letters fell from his hands. "Can I have missed one in my haste?" And then again he examined the letters, but the second scrutiny was as fruitless as the first.

"Am I to be forever baffled in my search?" he muttered. "Is there no special providence to lead this man into my hands that I may call him to an account?"

And then as the stranger, masquerading in such an odd fashion, rose to his feet, the white horse, which had been quietly cropping the prairie grass a few feet off, put its muzzle up in the air and began to sniff the breeze from the north.

The man had noticed the action.

"Hey, old gal, what's the matter? Danger, eh? White man or Indian?"

A loud neigh coming from the gully answered the question.

And then, as if the new comers had guessed that it would be useless to attempt to conceal their approach, now that the neighing steed had betrayed them, forth from the gulch came the sound of horses' hoofs urged into a gallop.

"No unshod Indian ponies' hoofs those!" cried the stranger, as he swung himself lightly into the saddle; "it must be a troop of United States cavalry; just by accident Paddy has run into them, and after hearing his story they concluded to steal in on me. Now, beauty show your metal, for we ride for life!"

The white steed evidently understood the words, for without even a touch of spur to her side, away went the mare over the prairie, light almost in her powerful stride as bird on wing.

Out from the gulch came the United States troops, mounted infantry, as the rider had guessed.

Bang—bang! the report of their carbines rung out on the still night air.

Fast over the prairie raced the pursued and pursuers.

The strange horseman turned in the saddle, laughed in defiance, and then, right before the astonished eyes of the soldiers, the horseman suddenly disappeared—vanished from sight just as if he had flown up into the air or sunk into the earth.

Involuntarily the soldiers drew rein in wonder.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BREAK IN THE PRAIRIE.

"What if it tempt you toward the flood?"

THE officer in command of the party, a gay young sprig of a lieutenant, who had won his "bars" at West Point, not amid the red fields of the great civil war, was the first to recover from the surprise occasioned by the mysterious disappearance of the strange horseman.

"By Jove! you know, this sort of thing really astonishes me!" he exclaimed; "where the deuce did the fellow go to? Did any of you see?"

Not a man in the command, numbering ten all told, besides the lieutenant, could answer the question.

"Shure, I tould ye that it was the devil or wan of his imps!"

Paddy Pud exclaimed. The Irishman was mounted behind one of the soldiers.

"Oh, but that is nonsense, my man," the officer rejoined; "that is all bosh; let us push forward and examine into the matter."

And then, after advancing a few hundred yards, the mystery of the strange disappearance of the masquerading horseman was fully revealed.

Extending in an almost straight line across the prairie, from north to south, was the bed of a watercourse, the level ten feet or so below the surrounding prairie.

The horseman, evidently posted as to the lay of the land, had ridden straight down the almost perpendicular bank of the now empty river-channel, for the hot prairie sun had long ago dried



up the feeble stream; it was a river only when, in the springtime, the snows melted on the mountain sides; and the horseman, taking advantage of the shelter thus afforded, had succeeded in escaping, for by the time his pursuers had reached the edge of the break horse and rider were out of sight.

Paddy Pud was not at all satisfied with this explanation; his belief in the unearthly nature of the horseman was too strong to be easily shaken.

The lieutenant, dismounting, called a couple of the men to accompany him, and clambered down into the ravine. By the light of the moon they endeavored to ascertain from the hoof-marks which way the horseman had gone. In the loose, light sand the tracks of the steed were plainly visible, and an expert tracker would have had very little difficulty in trailing the fugitive, even by the light afforded by Madam Luna.

But the soldiers were neither scouts nor Indians, and they were soon baffled in their attempt to follow the trail. As near as they could make out, though, the horseman had ridden to the north—toward Deadwood.

They clambered up the bank again, and after mounting their horses, held a consultation.

"It is useless to attempt to follow the fellow; he is probably five miles away by this time," the officer said.

"Yes, sir; the horse was a runner," the corporal responded.

"It's a dale of holy wather, and a praste, and a prayer, ye'd made to catch that gentleman, do ye mind?" Paddy exclaimed, expressively.

The soldiers laughed, and the corporal added:

"He played it on you, Paddy."

"Yis, of course, ye know all about it," the driver replied, with great dignity. "But I'll lay ye two pins to a slap on the back that there ain't a man to the fore here that will l'ave me pop at him wid my revolvers as I did at this thing, whatever it was, living or dead!"

The soldiers were rather astonished at this declaration.

"How many shots did you fire, Paddy?" the lieutenant asked.

"Not wan, sur; divil a cap would go off! Shure, the thing put a spell on them!"

Again the troopers laughed: the joke was too rich.

"Well, suppose we gallop up to the hack and see how much plunder he's taken," suggested the officer.

"Divil a bit of plunder was there aboard, barrin' the mail," Paddy growled, as the horses struck into a brisk trot. The doughty Irishman was not pleased with the unbelief manifested so openly as to the specter.

On arriving at the hack, the lieutenant found, as he had expected, the mail-bag open and the letters scattered over the ground.

"Just as I told you," he said, dismounting and examining the bag. "Opened by a key, too. Your spirit, Paddy, works in very mortal-like ways."

"And phat the divil would the likes of him want with letthers?" asked Paddy, in wonder, joining the lieutenant on the ground.

"After valuable letters, I suppose, though I don't see exactly how he expected to get them in a mail from Deadwood; but I can't waste any more time with you now," and then the lieutenant swung himself into the saddle again. "I must be off after my deserters."

The squad were in chase of a couple of soldiers who had forsaken Uncle Sam's colors and made a run for it.

"You had better gather the letters up, drive back to Deadwood and report."

And then the officer gave the command and the soldiers rode off, leaving the driver in a state of great bewilderment.

"Begorra! it was a spirit!" he muttered, shaking his clenched fist at the fast-retreating soldiers. "Bad 'cess to ye, ye murderin' blue-coated marauders! Is it the likes of yees that will tell Paudeen O'Hoolahan that he don't know a gentleman from the other world whin he sees him?"

Having relieved his mind with this defiant speech, the Irishman proceeded to pick up the letters and replace them in the mail-bag from which they had been so cleverly abstracted.

Then he tossed the bag into the hack, mounted the box and headed the team for Deadwood.

Great was the astonishment of the express-agent—Thomas Black, the "deacon"—when Paddy roused him from his slumbers at an early hour in the morning and related the strange attack on the coach.

The deacon was also the postmaster, and he immediately proceeded to examine the letters. "Did he take any, Paddy?" he asked, as, with a nervous, trembling hand, he ran the letters over.

"Sorra a wan of me knows," the Irishman replied. "Shure! I thought it was a man furst, an' I blazed away at him like a major."

"And your weapons missed fire, you say?" Black had finished the examination of the letters and there was an anxious, troubled look upon his face.

"Yis, sur, iv'ry wan of thim! I never saw the likes of it before."

Again Black commenced to run the letters through his hands, examining each and every superscription closely.

"Did you have any caps on your weapons?"

In a twinkling the Irishman whipped out the revolvers, and showed the cylinders fully capped.

"Examine the caps; perhaps they have been tampered with?" the deacon suggested. He was a sly old coon, and as long-headed as any man in the Deadwood district.

"Oh, no doubt about their being in good order, sur; it's meself that always attinds to them," Paddy said, confidently. But, he did examine the caps and discovered, to his utter amazement, that they had undoubtedly been tampered with, the explosive material having been carefully removed.

"Holy smoke!" cried Paddy, in wonder. Then he produced his rifle, and an inspection plainly revealed that that weapon had also been rendered harmless.

"I thought as much," the deacon observed, evidently very much disturbed in his mind. "The scheme was skillfully and carefully arranged. You are sure that you did not leave any letters behind when you gathered them up and put them in the bag again?"

"Oh, yis, sur, I was careful to pick up iv'ry scrap of paper!" the Irishman asserted.

"You are quite sure?"

"Yis, as sure as I stand here on me two feet this minute; but what is the matter, sur; are any of the letters gone?"

"Yes, two are missing. There were sixty-five letters in the bag. I remember the number distinctly, and now there are only sixty-three."

"And whose letters are gone, do ye think?"

"Ah, that is a mystery," the deacon replied, but here the deacon spoke falsely, for it was no mystery to him.

## CHAPTER VI

### "MONTANA."

"For thy three thousand ducats, here are six."

BUSINESS was lively in the Big Horn saloon, as the principal hotel of Deadwood was termed. It was Saturday night and every miner for ten miles around had come into town to procure supplies for the coming week, and, if sober truth be related, the most of them who came from a distance, were fully intent upon making up for their week of toil in the mountain gulches, by getting full of the "bug-juice" retailed so freely over the bars of festive Deadwood.

A credit to the "city" was the Big Horn saloon; as good liquor sold there as could be found clear along the iron-way of the Union Pacific from Omaha to Ogden City. And naturally therefore, the creature comforts dispensed over the well-stocked bar of the "Big Horn shanty," as the irreverent miners were wont to term Dick Skelly's place, were in great demand.

Then, too, at the Big Horn, or some kindred resort, all the news of the day could be heard, and, therefore, in the evening the saloons were a place of general resort, even for the men who were not partial to strong liquors.

A sort of merchant's exchange the saloon was to the bustling business men of Deadwood.

It was a bright moonlight evening and the streets were almost as light as by day.

A group of miners were gathered before the door of the saloon, eagerly engaged in discussing the big strike reported to have been recently made in the West Gulch by the owners of the Little Montana mine.

"Who owns the concern, anyway?" asked one of the listeners, evidently a stranger.

"Why, it's Hallowell and Montana's strike," the teller of the tale answered.

"Montana?" The stranger was puzzled by the appellation.

"Yes, William Jones as he calls himself, but all the boys call him Montana; thar's whar he hails from, an' thar's a durn sight too many Jones' round this hyer county now, so we gin this one a handle that's going to stick to him," the free and easy citizen of the Black Hills metropolis answered. "Thar he is now," he added, as he caught sight of the individual referred to coming slowly up the street.

And all the little knot of people turned eagerly to look at the man, whose name for the last three days had been in everybody's mouth. The "Little Montana" had struck the richest "lead" that had been discovered in the vicinity of Deadwood for a long time.

"Montana" was not a man to be passed without a second glance, even in the Black Hills, where so many strange characters jostled elbows.

He stood just about the medium hight, but most superbly built, every limb in just proportion; and the well-developed muscles swelling out under the silken skin like branches of steel wire, gave promise of wonderful strength. A peculiar head; the long, oval, high-cheeked-boned face of the Southwest; the black eyes and raven-bued hair of the Louisiana creole; the hair straight as the locks of an Indian, worn long behind, and rudely cropped in front, savage fashion; a long silken mustache curled down over the ends of the firm-set mouth, black as the hair, and a small imperial, just filling up the hollow between the full, red under lip, and the point of the square, massive chin, adorned the odd, peculiar face. The complexion of the man was the strangest thing about him. Marble-like was the color of the skin, not a tinge of vermilion on the cheeks nor a touch of bronzing, though the kiss of the sun-god is hot in the Black Hill gulches.

His dress, too, was a strange contrast to the garb of the men who usually made Deadwood city their headquarters.

He was rigged out in full Indian fashion, except that the deer-skin hunting-shirt which he wore, was cut like a sack-coat with pockets at the side, and was buttoned across the chest instead of being confined by a belt. It was thrown open at the throat, exposing the bosom of a red flannel shirt, loosely buttoned around the massive, finely-formed neck. His head was covered by the broad-brimmed, high-crowned felt hat, so commonly worn on the frontier—semi-military in its character.

No weapons did Montana display, so different from the majority



of the miners, who generally strutted around with small sized arsenals strapped to their waists.

More than one had commented upon this fact, and it was shrewdly suspected that Montana was well "heeled," to use the frontier "lingo," borrowed from the slang of the English cockpit, although he made no display of knife or pistol.

In fine, Montana carried his weapons concealed beneath his clothing, after the fashion of the citizens of the Eastern metropolises, rather than use the honest miner's custom of the far West and buckle them plainly to his waist.

But a quiet, peaceable man Mr. William Jones seemed to be, for he had never been concerned in any trouble since his advent in Deadwood; perhaps it was because from his build and muscular development, he gave promise of proving a troublesome customer if roused to anger.

As Montana approached the saloon he nodded to those of the little group standing before the door with whom he was acquainted, and was about to pass in, when a burly figure emerged from the entrance and accosted him.

"You're jest the man I want to see, Montana."

The speaker was the new-comer's partner, Elijah Hollowell, a big, brawny specimen of humanity from the pine woods of Eastern Maine; big in person, big in heart; a man, every inch of him.

"Jest the man I wanted ter see, by gosh!" Hollowell repeated. "Come here a minit," and then he dragged Montana a little out of earshot of the rest. "Say, I've had an offer for the mine—twelve thousand dollars, clean cash! That's six thousand apiece an' a royalty afterwards on top o' that. What do ye think of it, hey?"

"I think that we had better hold on to the mine," Montana answered, speaking in the slow, clear, deep, peculiar voice natural to him, and which was so great a contrast to the shrill tones of the New England native or the hoarse gutturals of the Western "Pike," Missouri's son.

"A powerful sight of money, twelve thousand dollars," Hollowell urged. He was evidently tempted by the offer.

"Yes, but if it is worth that to any one else, it is worth that to us; besides, who is there round these diggings that has got twelve thousand dollars in cash?" Montana was plainly an unbeliever.

"Oh, that's all right; it's a 'pilgrim' jest got in. He's got the rocks—gobs of 'em!" Hollowell explained. "He intends to get up a stock company, put in mining machinery so as to properly develop the claim, an' he says that in his mind there is no doubt but that we will make more from our royalty, arter he gets the thing properly organized and running, than we are getting now, and we'll have the twelve thousand dollars in our pockets, hey! What do you think of that?"

The son-of-the-State-of-Maine, as Hollowell was fond of terming himself, was considerably excited.

"Christmas!" he continued, without waiting for Montana to reply; "twelve thousand dollars! and you only paid three thousand dollars for the hull thing, and everybody sed that you were cheated, too."

"Lige!" exclaimed Montana, abruptly, addressing his partner by the familiar camp term, "you've been drinking."

The good-natured giant was confused for a moment by the direct accusation, but never attempted to deny the fact.

"Christmas!" he stammered; "why, Montana, you must be able to see right into a feller! Talk 'bout hawk-eyes! You must have eyes like a gimlet."

"Well, Lige, I never saw you so before," Montana said.

"That's so; I hold a heap, I guess, too, but this pilgrim to-night got my measure, an' he's filled me chock up. Fuller'n a tick; if I ain't I wish I may die! But I know what I'm about, Montana, don't I? Come, old pard; I ain't drunk, am I?"

"Oh, no; but it wouldn't take much more to make you so."

"By gosh! you're right there!" the giant exclaimed, in a burst of confidence. "Montana, you're always right! You've got a head on you jest as steady as a clock. I never seed you off your balance-wheel yet, an' we've been running in double harness some time now, pard. You're a man, you are; an', as many a time I've told the boys, you kin jest beat the world on flapjacks!"

"How did this thing commence?" asked Montana, never heeding the liberal praise bestowed upon his culinary skill.

"Well, I got talking the matter over with this gentleman—I tell you, he's got the rocks—an' as a business man he sweeps the deck!" Hollowell answered.

"Yes, and he asked you to drink!"

"By gol, he did! an' then I set 'em up; an' then Dick Skelly set 'em up, an'—Montana, if you take this offer, the money will get you that little bright-eyed gal, as sure as shootin'!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BOSS BULL-WHACKER OF "SHIAN."

"So should he look that seems to speak things strange!"

MONTANA looked the speaker full in the eye for a moment, and a peculiar expression appeared upon his pale face.

"Yes, sir-ee!" continued the open-hearted man-from-Maine; "with the rocks in your pocket you kin get the gal—jest as easy as rolling off a log; an' oh! ain't she handsome! Well, now, you kin jest bet on that! She's got a face as fresh as a barn door on a frosty morning!"

"What do you mean?" Montana asked, quietly, but evidently offended by the allusion.

Hollowell, however, was in altogether too great a state of ex-

citement, and too much under the influence of the potent bug-juice, to notice it.

"Why, Miss Kirkley, of course; I ain't blind, Montana! 'Tain't for nothing that she comes galivanting up the West Gulch, and that little bunch of posies that she had the other day was brought up expressly for you, too, but I'm the biggest fool west of the Missouri, and I never dusted out so she could gin 'em to you; but I sw'ar, Montana, I never thought 'bout it, till she lit out."

"You're dreaming, man," was Montana's curt reply.

"Not much, old partner!" Hollowell cried. "Oh! you can't pull the wool over my eyes! It can't be did! I'm up to snuff, I am!"

"See here, old fellow; I'm not the kind of man to run after a woman," Montana said, grimly. "I've seen altogether too much of 'em; seen enough in years gone by to make me keep away from 'em all the rest of the days of my life!"

"Sho! you don't say so!" Hollowell exclaimed, with the peculiar gravity so natural to some men when under the influence of liquor.

"Why, Montana, she's jest as handsome as kin be!"

"So is the tiger-cat, but a man ain't apt to think of the beauty when he feels the claws tearing at his throat."

"What in thunder has got into you, anyway?" asked the big son of Maine, in wonder, greatly amazed at the peculiar expression upon the pale face of Montana.

"Nothing at all."

"But I never heard you speak in this way before."

"Never had occasion to, perhaps."

"Gosh! I rally thought that you kinder had a hankering arter the gal."

"You thought wrongly."

"But what makes her come up the West Gulch so much, hey?"

"Answer your own conundrums," replied Montana, evasively.

"Well, if you ain't arter the gal, I guess that she's arter you."

"Much good it will do her."

Montana was in a decidedly bad humor.

"Sho! wouldn't you like the gal to have a kind of sneaking notion arter you, hey?" asked Hollowell, shrewdly.

"No."

"Well, I would!" the tall man from Maine exclaimed, honestly.

"Why, it is you that she is coming after!" Montana said, with a grave face.

"Oh! go 'way with you! You can't stuff me!" the big miner replied. "But, Montana, I don't want to pry into your affairs, and ef this durned whisky hadn't got up into my head, I would have held my tongue, although I've suspicioned the thing for a week or more."

"There is no harm done; we can't help our thoughts."

"And I ar'n't the only one, either, that has suspected it," Hollowell exclaimed, sturdily.

"What! is there any other fool—I beg your pardon, Lige, I don't want to hurt your feelings!" Montana said, with a spice of grim humor in his tone.

"Oh, go it! I kin stand it; hard words break no bones," the other returned, grinning, good-naturedly. "But, it's a sure enough fact, thar's another party has had his eyes on the gal."

"Yes," and Montana's tone was one of perfect unconcern.

"Fact! I've seen him promenading past our place, with his shotgun slung in the hollow of his arm, a half a dozen times lately, and I reckon that when Miss Kirkley comes walking up the gulch, as she has done pretty often the last week or two, that observing cuss ain't far off."

Montana appeared annoyed.

"Why didn't you say something about this before?" he asked.

"It wasn't my soup! How did I know that you wouldn't object to my sticking my spoon in," replied Hollowell in his rough, off-hand way. "You've got eyes like a hawk, too; I thought that, mebbe, you had noticed how the cat jumped."

"No, I never thought of such a thing; I'll own up, frankly, Lige, I do like to talk with the girl. Her presence here amid these wild scenes and rude surroundings is like a camelia flower blooming in a desert waste; it calls back hours of peace and joy amid the blossoms of civilization, and for the moment I close my eyes; another image rises there, and then I think what *might have been* if fortune had smiled kindly on me."

Never before had big Elijah Hollowell seen his partner—cold, stern-faced, iron-willed Montana—in such a mood, and he was considerably astonished.

"Sho! I guess that you have been married, then!" he said.

"Oh, yes," replied Montana, relapsing instantly again into his usual coolness. "Yes, pard, I have been married—much married, as they say of the Prophet Brigham, three or four times, and Injuns I don't count."

"Get out! now you're stuffing me again!"

"But who is this gentleman that has manifested so much interest in the West Gulch and its surroundings?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Lige, I am not a Yankee like you, and guessing isn't my best holt," Montana replied, quietly.

"Major Germaine!"

"The deuce you say!" Montana was surprised.

"Fact for sure."

"And is he after the fair Mercedes?"

"Oh, he's jest hot arter her! why, it's the talk of the town how he hangs round her."

"I don't admire him, much," Montana observed, slowly. "I don't know why it is, I have no reason to dislike him, but some-way—I suppose it is a kind of presentiment I have—I feel sure that he is no friend of mine."

"I reckon that he won't be ef he thinks that you are arter the gal, or that she is arter you."

"Oh, he needn't trouble himself about that," Montana said, carelessly. "As far as I am concerned, he can have the girl and welcome."



"But to come back to business, you didn't want to sell, hey?"  
 "No."

"It's a big sum, and then that's the royalty afterwards, you know."

"The party wants to organize a stock company, did you say?"  
 "Yes, put in machinery and go at it in tip-top shape. Oh, I tell yer! he's a master feller for business."

"What's his name—do I know him?" abruptly demanded Montana.

"Oh, no, he's a stranger in these parts, but he's a great gun in mining matters. He's a big toad in the puddle, you bet."

"What's his name?" again asked Montana.

"Campbell."

"Campbell!" and cool, stone-like Montana almost started.

"Yes, Mortimer Campbell, Esquire, Member of Congress from Illinois."

"Oh, I know the man!" Montana exclaimed quickly, and an angry light shone in his eyes. "Mort Campbell from Egypt, as he is always termed, the biggest scoundrel that ever escaped the hangman's noose. Sell the mine to him? Why, old man, we wouldn't get a dollar. Organize a company! Pah! inside of six months he'd have mine, company and everything, and all fixed lawfully and legally."

"Well, you are acquainted with him!"

"Yes, and yet I never saw him in my life nor he me."

"Whar's the man they call Montana?" cried a hoarse voice just then, and turning the two beheld a brawny, red-shirted, big booted man, with a whole arsenal of weapons belted to his waist, his head surmounted by a silk hat curiously battered up into a conical shape, and the brim pulled down over his eyes.

Straight up to Montana he strode.

"Oh, look at me!" he cried; "I'm Jimmus Bludsoe, the boss bull-whacker of Shian! own cousin to the mate of the Per-arie Belle!" and then he half squatted down with his hands on his thighs, and glared at the miner. "I'm the old he-goat of the Big Horn mountain range—ba-a-a! Stranger, slap me in the face if you love me!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LITTLE OF THE WRESTLER'S ART.

"Now, Hercules be thy speed, young man!"

THIS was the first time that the eyes of the citizens of Deadwood had ever rested upon the uncouth and strangely-attired unknown, and, naturally, his sudden and decidedly dramatic appearance excited a great deal of astonishment.

His loud tone, too, as well as the nature of the words he uttered, attracted the attention of all within ear-shot, and the words were hardly out of his mouth before a little circle of wondering miners began to gather around him.

The most astonished man in the crowd was the one whom he had addressed in such a familiar manner—the quiet and stern-faced Montana.

He turned in utter surprise as the boisterous boasts of the stranger rung out on the night air, and, facing the new-comer, surveyed him with wonder.

The man was an utter stranger to him; never before, to Montana's knowledge, had his eyes rested upon the red and swollen face of the man who had so proudly proclaimed himself to be own cousin and namesake of the ever-to-be-remembered mate of the "Prairie Belle."

The moon was shining brightly and afforded plenty of light for the striking tableau thus so suddenly formed.

"Yes, sir-ee!" bellowed the man, loudly; "you are the meat I seek! I'm fur you, you king-pin of Deadwood! I'm chief, I am! Lemme introduce myself!"

And then the stranger drew himself up proudly, and removing the battered-up silk hat swung it gracefully in the air.

"Jimmus Bludsoe, that's my name, and ashamed of it I ain't! I'm the pet of the Niobrara—the head-aule of the Laramie trail! the everlasting, snorting, screaming, thickwooled, short-tailed old he-goat of the Big Horn mountain range, baa-a-a!"

And then at the top of his lungs the aquatic—for such he seemed—bleated like a goat.

"Do you know him?" asked Hallowell, astonished at the antics of the fellow.

Montana shook his head.

He had taken the stranger's measure pretty correctly, as the saying is. It was not the first time that he had seen some brawny ruffian proclaim himself "chief," and dare to mortal combat a whole mining-camp, thirsting for glory under the influence of the potent liquor so commonly dispensed on the outskirts of civilization; but, why this man should single him out by name, to pick a quarrel with, was a mystery. As a general rule the daring soul who plants himself in the middle of the street and proclaims that he is a chief of note, and on the war-path, never cares much who he fights as long as he fights somebody.

"Yes, sir-ee!" yelled the stranger; "Montana! That's the name of the diggings I dispise! Jest slap me in the face, and then I'm fur you, tooth and toe-nails! You've hee'd of me, I reckon, own cousin to Jim of the Par-arie Belle."

"Oh, he warn't no saint, was Jimmus,  
 Them engineers—and bull-whackers—are jist  
 ty much all alike,  
 One wife in Natchez-under-the-hill,  
 An' sixteen hyer in Pike,  
 An' her Texas sat on her hurricane-deck,  
 An' he howled above the roar,  
 I'll keep her nozzle ag'in the bank,  
 Till I an my part's ashore."

That's me! I'm his pard, all of me! I'm the blue-nosed, ring-tailed b'ar of Wolf Mountain! Slap me in the face, you deer-skin kivered cuss, an' see how I'll peel those 'tarnal Injun's flixin's offen you! I'm the game-cock of the divide! I'm all spur except my head and that's a bullet! Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

The antics of the brawny fellow, coupled with his absurd speech, were so ridiculous that the bystanders fairly roared with laughter.

"Come, strip for the love of goodness, mister!" yelled the bull-whacker. "I've got to eat a grizzly b'ar 'tween now and morn-ing and I'm gitting hungry!"

"I've no quarrel with you," said Montana, hardly knowing what to make of the fellow.

"Of course you ain't—how could you? You never see'd me afore, but now I'm hyer."

"The Moraster was a better boat,  
 But the Belle she wouldn't be passed;  
 An' so she tore along, the oldest boat on the line,  
 This cuss a-squattin' on her safety valve,  
 An' Bludsoe chock full of whisky an' wine!"

Come, off with your deer-skin, and gi'n me a tussle. Jest for the fun of the thing I'm full of fun—b'iling over!"

"I'll take a turn with you, by gosh!" cried Hallowell, stepping forward, his blood heated with the unusual quantity of drink which he had imbibed, and prompt to take up the quarrel which Montana seemed unwilling to assume.

"Stranger, you air a trump!" cried the brawny fellow, in admiration, "but you ain't the b'ar I've lost to-day. This hyer gent is what I want to feed on! Say, spit in my face onc't and oblige yourn truly!"

"Hold on!" said Montana, his strong right hand on Hallowell's shoulder, "I am able to attend to my own affairs. All I wish to know is why I am singled out in this manner. I never saw this fellow before in my life, and if he has come to Deadwood expressly to fight the bully of the town I think that any one of my acquaintances here will tell him that I am not the man he seeks."

"Stranger, for the love of heaven let's fight and not talk," yelled the unknown. "You're the man I want. I'm heeled! Jest spit in my face or slap it, or tread on my toes, or say I can't drink, or—"

"He won't fight; Montana is a coward!" cried a voice from the crowd.

Each man looked at his neighbor, and Montana started as if he had trodden upon a rattle-snake and the whirr of the reptile's alarm was in the air.

The voice seemed to come from a portion of the circle where some blue uniforms were visible—soldiers from the fort.

"Will the man who said that step out and show himself?" Montana exclaimed, evidently under the influence of great excitement, for every muscle in his powerful frame was trembling.

No one stirred.

The maker of the charge evidently did not care to back up his words by deeds.

"Never mind him; I'm your bundle of hay. I'm the oats for you to fodder on!" cried Bludsoe, fairly dancing up and down and swinging his arms around like a pair of windmills. "Jest gi'n me a leetle crack in the face an' I'll call it square, oh, you long-legged, slabsided—"

What more he would have said is not known, for Montana, with a single sweep of his muscular arm, gave the boss bull-whacker the crack he so earnestly desired.

The blow was given with the palm of the open hand, but so skillfully delivered, and with such force, that it sounded like the crack of a mule-driver's whip, and tumbled the quarrelsome stranger over sideways with an aching head.

But on his feet again in an instant was the brawny fellow, and he rushed at Montana with all the strength and fury of a wild bull.

Not unprepared, though, was the miner, and as the bull-whacker rushed at him, headlong, he jumped to one side, tripped the giant with his foot, caught him as he fell forward with his left arm round his bull neck, pressed the head against his side, and with a strength and skill such as few men in that crowd had ever seen displayed before, lifted the assailant bodily from the ground and threw him over his shoulder.

Down came the giant, flat on his back, with a thud that fairly shook the earth; the bull head dropped back with a gasp escaping from the thick-lipped mouth, and the man lay limp and still.

A little of the wrestler's art Montana had exhibited that night in Deadwood. He had "cross-buttocked" the giant and given him what a Cornish man would have termed a "burster."

"He's killed!" cried one of the crowd, in alarm, noticing that the man did not stir.

On the other side of the street, in the shadow of a house, stood a gentleman and lady; passing down the street, they had stopped, attracted by the crowd, and had witnessed the affair.

"Come, Dianora; you take a strange interest in this street brawl," the gentleman, Congressman Mort Campbell, said.

"No wonder; one of them is my husband!" the Washingtonian belle answered.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SATISFACTION.

"We work by wit and not by witchcraft."

"THE man is dead, sure enough!" cried another of the crowd, as they all pressed around the prostrate form of the boasting bull-whacker.



Stand back and give him air!" exclaimed a third looker-on. "It was done on the square!" cried Hallowell, deeply impressed with the skill of his quiet partner.

"The puttiest thing I ever seed!" cried a rough-bearded miner, in high admiration.

"Throw some water over him!" suggested the landlord of the Big Horn saloon, who had been attracted to the door by the noise.

"Give him some whisky!" sung out one of the crowd.

"No, don't waste the liquor!" cried another.

The average American must have his joke, and the rougher the crowd the keener the sense of humor.

But some one of the bystanders was prompt to act upon the suggestion of Dick Skelly, the Boniface of the Big Horn, and a tumbler of water was dashed into the upturned face of the giant.

The sudden dash of cold water produced the result anticipated, and slowly Mr. Jimmus Bludsoe opened his great goggle-eyes.

He stared around him for a few moments, evidently bewildered, and without making any attempt to get up.

"How goes it, old man?" asked the fellow with the tumbler, who possessed an inquiring mind.

"The boss bull-whacker of Cheyenne's famous town" slowly rose to a sitting posture and blinked his eyes around him.

"Say! wot sort of a town do you call this, whar you knock a man down an' then throw a brick house on top of him?" the giant demanded.

There was a moment of silence after this question was propounded, and then a roar of laughter went up from the throats of the crowd.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the miners, and one stout individual fairly roared till the tears came in his eyes.

An indignant look appeared upon the features of the stranger.

"Funny, ain't it?" he growled; "but I'll jest go you two dollars an' a half that you don't play it on this chap ag'in. Hyer's my shoulders, but whar's my head?"

And then the crowd roared again.

The bull-whacker's eyes fell upon Montana, standing with folded arms in the moonlight.

"I take it all back, stranger; you ain't the man I want to see, at all. I've barked up the wrong tree; I thought that you hadn't any fun in you, but you're as full of fun as a meataxi!"

"Are you satisfied?" asked Montana, grimly; his blood was up now, and he felt inclined to give the braggart another taste of his quality; then, too, still in his ears was ringing the taunting voice which had branded him as a coward in the open streets of Deadwood.

"Satisfied?" cried Bludsoe, still retaining his sitting posture. "Blazes! yes—I ain't a hog! I know when I've got enough."

"Easily satisfied!" cried a voice in the crowd; the same voice which had previously taunted Montana. It was plain that the intent was to spur the giant on to another trial of Montana's prowess.

"Oh, you bet!" Bludsoe responded, with a grin, rising to his feet and shaking his head as the grizzly bear shakes his noddle when the leaden balls of the hunters rattle fruitlessly upon it.

"Come an' take a hand in the thing yourself. You want too much pork for a shilling, you do. I don't play circus all the time." And then the giant turned and surveyed Montana with a great deal of curiosity. "Pardner, you're a well-built man, but how you did it gets me."

"Try it on again, and maybe you'll discover," Montana answered.

"No, thank you, no sugar in mine, this time," Mr. Bludsoe replied. "I've got all I want fur the present. I've had a fair show fur my money, and now I'll quit; but how you did it—why, I'm big enough to eat you!"

"I reckon that it is because I have learned to use my hands and feet, and you haven't," Montana replied.

"Sarten; I reckon that's a fact! Wa-al, you'll have to excuse me now; some other time I'll try to squar' this account, for I hate to owe any man anything. So-long! Much obleeged, boys, fur your seein' that I had a fair show, but mebbe I'd feel better in my mind if 'bout a dozen of you had jumped on me, so that I could have had a fair excuse to take water. It's the first time that a Bludsoe of the Per-a-rie Belle ever cried quits on the fust heat!" and with this remark the giant walked away; the crowd opened and made room for him to pass down the street.

The miners watched the burly form until it disappeared in the shadows cast by the shanties below, and many a jest went round at the expense of the "old he-goat of the Big Horn mountain range," as the stranger had proudly termed himself—the man who had come for wool and returned shorn.

Montana and Hallowell walked slowly away from the front of the saloon, proceeding up the street.

"By gosh, Montana!" the tall son-of-Maine exclaimed, "that was the handsomest thing I ever see'd! Why, you downed him as slick as a whistle. Christmas! why I never see'd anything like that before. Say, that's a prize-fighter's trick, ain't it?"

"Yes, they use it; it is about the worst fall that you can give a man, and this fellow was so big and unwieldy that his own weight made him come down with terrible force. I don't think that I could catch him again on it, though."

"Montana, you ain't seen the last of that fellow!" Hallowell exclaimed, abruptly, after thinking about the matter for a moment.

"You think so?" Montana was non-committal.

"Sarten; he'll try and do you a mischief for that pretty trick you showed him to-night."

"If he's not careful I'll show him one worth two of that," Montana replied, in his cold, quiet way.

"Why, I hadn't the least idee that you understood how to fight!"

"Partner, I hav'n't lived thirty-odd years in this world for nothing. I have fought my own way ever since I was a boy of ten years; I've been all over the world as a sailor, and it would be a wonder if, after knocking round the way I have, I didn't know a trick or two worth the knowing."

"But this fellow looked to be almost twice as big as you are."

"He probably weighs forty or fifty pounds more than I do, but it's useless fat, about as valuable to him as so many pounds of lead would be belted to his waist. I am weighing now about a hundred and sixty, but it's my fighting weight, as the saying is, and I couldn't take off ten pounds without being the worse for it. Why, with my knowledge of boxing and superior agility, if I came to a fisticuff encounter with this fellow, I'd hammer him all to pieces and barely get a bruise myself."

"Well, now, Montana, I declare you kin shoot me if I ain't astonished!" Hallowell exclaimed. "We have bin partners now for some time, and I never s'picioned that you was that sort of man at all. You allus seemed to try to keep out of fusses."

"So I do, but once in, I know how to bear my part," his companion replied, significantly.

"You'll have to 'heel' yourself now, though."

In far Western parlance to "heel" is to arm. With a couple of revolvers, a bowie-knife and a double-barreled shot-gun a man would be considered well "heeled."

"I am 'heeled,'" Montana replied, quietly.

"Gosh! I never saw you with any weapon."

"But I've got them though, nevertheless," Montana answered, with a quiet smile. "I don't wear them openly, but if any one thinks to catch me unprepared for a skirmish, he'll find out his mistake when the thing is tried on."

"Oh, by the way, that man Campbell was looking on during the fuss."

"Yes."

"You won't sell him the mine?"

"I'll see him further first, the old rascal!"

"Mighty fine gal that daughter of his'n."

"Has he got a daughter?" Montana said, carelessly.

"I bet yer! a regular screamer, too; jest the kind of gal to suit you, Montana; you ought to go for her. Oh, she's a high-stepper; more ribbons and fixings and yellor hair—"

"I reckon that I don't want her," Montana returned, coldly. "If she takes after her dad, she's a bad egg!"

## CHAPTER X.

### A WILLFUL WOMAN.

"As rough as are the swelling Adriatic seas."

"Your husband!" Mr. Congressman Campbell exclaimed, in supreme astonishment.

"Exactly, papa, my husband," the lady repeated, speaking in the most matter-of-fact tone possible.

She was a tall, handsome girl, this Dianora Campbell, stylish as any queen of fashion's center, with her waving tresses of yellow hair, her great blue eyes—rather light in hue and sometimes shading a little toward an ominous green, when passion swayed her soul—her regular features, well-proportioned form and general air of refinement.

Full of blue blood were the veins of Dianora, if face, figure and speech could be trusted, but alack and well-a-day! this tall, stately and really beautiful girl was the daughter of old Mort Campbell, now a Member of Congress from Illinois, but formerly a cattle-drover, a coarse, brutal fellow, with an appetite as earthy in its nature as the beasts he traded in.

But Mort Campbell—as his fellow-drovers always called him in the old time, and the name stuck to him still, although long ago he had ceased trading in cattle to deal in men—was smart; he was a man noted for his sharp bargains, and many traders kept their eyes open when they dealt with him. No honest fool was the speculator to let abstruse theories keep money out of his pocket; he was in the world to make money, honestly, if he could, but to make it anyway, by hook or crook.

Campbell thrived—such men do generally appear to thrive and wax fat in this world's vanities, while weaker and more honest fellows lose heart watching the rising of such evil stars, and question the wisdom of Providence that seems to favor the evil-doer.

A smart man indeed was Campbell, for nothing stopped him; his word was as a rope of straw—his bond, a foolish thing, fit only for a lawyer's plaything.

When other men kept their faith and lost, he broke contracts and escaped the ruin.

A smart, thriving, fore-handed man indeed was the thick-set, coarse-featured, vulgar-mannered, red-headed, red-whiskered Congressman.

And how came the Illinois drover to be elected to a seat in that body of august wisdom, which we patient lookers-on set to rule over us, and who, with grave faces, we call statesmen, "Heaven save the mark!"

The explanation was easy. In a certain district in lower Illinois, Egypt, as it used to be termed in the days when the Illinois central railway was forcing its path through the almost uninhabited prairies, that are now blossoming like the rose, thanks to the adventuring emigrants from afar, one party largely outnumbered its opponent.

Egypt they termed the land in contempt, and, in truth, it was a region sadly needing the light of civilization, and some parts of it even at the present time would be benefited by a little more schoolmaster and a little less whisky.

As we have said, one political party was much stronger than



the other—so much so that the weaker side had great difficulty in getting a candidate to run at all, for, mark you, elections cost money, and it is poor consolation to pay for certain defeat, for few elections are there in this, or any other land, where the contestants do not "shell out" liberally to influence the free and independent voter.

It was a forlorn hope, then, that Mort Campbell led when he secured the nomination and set himself up to be knocked down at the polls on election day, as all believed.

For once in his life the wily Mort had apparently made a mistake, and many a local prophet shook his head and suggested that "pride runneth to a fall," and that Mort's sudden rise to fortune by dark and cunning devices had turned his head, and that as he had emulated a rocket he would now enact the stick.

But Campbell seemed as familiar with the devious ways that lead to political fortune as any man-jack of them all.

Money he spent like water; stout-shouldered, big-fisted fellows, imported from the slums of Chicago, acted as his advocates; voters were colonized, newspapers bought, and all the "ways that are dark and tricks that were vain" were employed.

The opposing candidate, sure of his election, neglected the canvass, and his followers sneered at the "hog-butcher" who wanted to go to Washington.

Quickly Campbell and his crowd took up the name.

He was a hog-butcher—a MAN OF THE PEOPLE—and he wasn't ashamed to own it, and that bold trick won him many votes.

Just twenty majority had Campbell when the votes were counted; he had won by a neck, as it were.

The other party stormed, contested the election, but Campbell had been too smart for them, and they couldn't prove the fraud that had evidently been committed.

And from that day to the present time Campbell had been regularly elected from that district.

True, the war had taken place and the district had veered in sentiment, first one way and then the other, but Campbell was like the historic postmaster who kept his office, no matter which party won; as he simply said he'd defy any administration to change quicker than he could.

No matter how great the political storm, Mr. Congressman Campbell always came up smiling on top of the billow.

And as the drover thrived, so doubly thrived the politician; he had only enlarged the sphere of his usefulness.

Great in railroads, great in embryo cities—metropolises yet to be—deeply interested in mines, coal in Illinois—his own district swarmed with mines—copper by Superior's waters, and now he had journeyed to Deadwood to try a little venture in the richer metals.

"See here! I don't understand this!" the father exclaimed; "where on earth did you get a husband?"

"In Chicago, papa," answered the girl, not at all abashed.

"Well, hang me!" cried Campbell, annoyed; "you never told me anything about it!"

"No, papa; it was while I was at school at Chicago and you were in Washington. I was only a child then, and it seemed so romantic to get married without letting any one know anything about it."

"By Jove! you're a cool hand!"

"Yes, papa; I take after you. I always do as I like, you know. The stupid fellow ran away from me after a little while and I didn't feel like telling anybody what a goose I had made of myself. I don't know why I said anything about it to-night, but I suppose it was because I was so surprised at seeing him. I thought the fellow was dead, long ago." The girl spoke as coolly as if she was talking of an animal, instead of a human, and that human the man she had sworn to love, honor and obey.

"Oh, you don't care for him, then?" This was the inference that the father had drawn from the daughter's tone.

"Well, I don't know—that depends," Dianora answered, slowly.

"Depends upon what?" Campbell was curious.

"Upon how he is situated, and what he is doing; if he has another wife, or is going to get one, then I may trouble him. I ought to punish him for the ugly trick he played me. It isn't complimentary to a girl to have her lover run away from her after he becomes her husband."

"What's his name?"

"Why should I tell you that? What use is it? He has probably used a dozen, and none of them his own."

The two had walked slowly up the street during this conversation and had now reached the hotel where they were stopping.

"Well, you will have your own way, of course," the father said, as he stepped over the threshold; "but, don't make a fool of yourself."

"Don't be afraid. I am too much like you not to be cautious," she answered, and the two passed into the house.

Five minutes afterward Montana and Hallowell came by, on their way home to their cabin in the West Gulch.

It was a wild, romantic place, hemmed in by great rocks, frowning down upon a little streamlet.

Hallowell entered the cabin while Montana strolled up the gorge to the mine. He craved solitude and silence that he might think.

And then, in the flash of an eye, a startling picture was formed in that wild ravine under the light of the moon. Up from the rocks and pines sprung a dozen red warriors, and with rifle and knife, and spear and tomahawk they threatened the life of Montana.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE PAINTED SNAKE.

"Rude am I in speech—"

THE surprise was complete. Utterly unsuspecting of danger Montana would as soon have expected to walk into a cordon of grizzly bears.

No chance was there to draw weapon, for the shining lance-head was within a foot of his breast, and a single motion of the arm of the muscular, painted savage who held it would have driven it through the heart of the miner.

Even at the risk of being killed upon the instant Montana would have raised a shout of alarm so that Hallowell might be warned of the danger that threatened, but he knew full well that the door of the shanty which served as a dwelling-place for himself and companion, was securely fastened on the inside. Both of the partners made it a rule never to leave the door unbarred for a single instant after nightfall.

The Little Montana claim was on the very outskirts of the settlement, and fully five hundred yards from any other house.

Then, too, Montana knew that it would be impossible for the Indians to surprise Hallowell, for the big son-of-the-State-of-Maine possessed a most remarkable Scotch terrier dog—the ugliest dog, perhaps, that the eye of mortal man ever looked upon, but Casco—as the dog was named, for Portland's beautiful bay—was worth his weight in gold as a watcher. He could neither be frightened nor coaxed, and seemed to be able to scent the approach of a stranger a quarter of a mile off.

No matter how stealthy the tread of the wily, wolf-like red warriors, Montana knew that Casco's keen nostrils and eager ears would detect them.

And so he held his peace, and calmly looked upon the threatening faces of the plumed and painted red-skins.

Even since the first settlement of Deadwood there had been more or less trouble with the fierce and warlike Sioux warriors, whose haughty chiefs, lords of the Black Hills, looked with angry eyes upon the invasion of the pale-faced settlers into the fairest part of their territory.

The miners were no children—no helpless emigrants, to be slaughtered in cold blood at the pleasure of the red butchers, but men armed to the teeth, and who dearly sold the life, seemingly held so lightly, when attacked.

Like the rush of the ancient Gauls into the smiling Roman fields, the miners had poured into the valleys of the Black Hills, and the ruthless red warriors wisely avoided an attack in force; but small parties of braves prowled cautiously around in the neighborhood of the mining-camps, eager to get a chance to cut off some solitary white man rashly adventuring beyond the lines of his settlement.

But for the last two months not a solitary red-skin had been seen in the vicinity of Deadwood, and this had induced a feeling of security now apparently to be rudely destroyed.

"White man speak—die!" exclaimed the brawny savage who threatened Montana with the glittering lance. The feather-ornamented lance, now hovering so near to the heart of the entrapped miner, was a good proof that the "Great Father at Washington" looked with a benignant eye upon his "helpless" red children, for it was composed of a sword bayonet dextrously attached to a hoe handle, thus forming a weapon not to be despised when wielded by a brawny savage.

Montana nodded. The untutored red-man does not always express himself perfectly in the language of the whites, but on this occasion, no scholar in the land could have defined a position clearer.

"Ugh! white man live in big lodge dere?" and the chief pointed to the shanty, which in the bright moonlight was plainly visible down the wild, gorge-like valley.

Again Montana nodded.

The savage looked earnestly for a moment in the face of the white man, and there was a peculiar glare in his dark eyes.

Evidently this was the prelude to something important.

"The Painted Snake is great chief in the Sioux nation. When he go on war-path all great braves in nation cry to go too," began the Indian, gravely. "My brudder would live; let him open his ears and listen. He no do what Sioux chief say the lance shall drink his blood."

Then the red-skin said a few words in the Sioux language to the other warriors.

It was plain that he did not believe that the white could understand him, but Montana in his wild career had passed through many strange scenes and learned many things, and among them was the tongue of the Dacotahs, to give to the Sioux nation its proper title, and therefore he fully understood the words of the red-man.

"We'll carry this dog of a white-skin to the big lodge; he shall tell the other white dog to open the door; then we will take his scalp and knock out the brains of the snarling cur. Bind his arms," said the Indian.

Two of the braves advanced to Montana's side, and with a lariat of deerskin tightly pinioned his arms.

The miner did not attempt to resist, for he knew that it would be folly.

This little operation performed the Painted Snake, who was evidently in command of the war-party, again addressed the prisoner.

"My brudder is a great warrior—he kill many Sioux chiefs?" this in a tone of question.

"No," replied Montana, laconically.

"He friend to Sioux nation?"

"Oh, yes, heap friend," replied the miner, with never a smile on his face.

"Good! The Painted Snake never kill friend. He shall go with his red brudder to door of big lodge dere—tell big white



man open door; den Sioux chiefs give him half plunder—let 'um go," said the Indian, with a stolid face, but with a curious glitter in his dark, treacherous eyes.

"My red brother speaks good," the miner replied; "a man will do anything to save his life."

"You go—eh?"

"Yes; half the plunder for me, you know."

"Yes, half; it is good!"

"And you will not harm me?"

"No—Injun swear!" and the chief gravely raised his brawny red fist toward the sky.

"Oh, I believe you, of course; by the way, you might as well untie my hands now that we have made a bargain."

The red-skins looked suspiciously at Montana's stolid face, and then, as with one accord, they all shook their heads, gravely.

"Do that pretty soon—bime-by," the Painted Snake replied.

"All right." The miner affected to be satisfied if he was not.

Again the head chief turned to the others and addressed them in their native language, and again, thanks to the knowledge he possessed, Montana understood every word he uttered.

"The white dog is cunning," said the chief: "he means to fool Sioux warriors. Two Horns—Yellow Eagle keep close to his side; have your weapons ready, but remember the commands of the great chief and the old Medicine Man."

Montana pricked up his ears. Figuratively speaking, there was a mystery in the words of the chief: "the commands of the great chief and the old Medicine Man." Did those commands refer to him? *What were they?*

"Ready, now?" asked the Indian, abruptly.

"Yes," Montana responded.

"You go—two warriors with you—say, open door—me; look out! Sioux knife in your heart you try fool us."

"Oh, trust me," the miner exclaimed.

"Mebbe yes; trust knives, too," the chief replied, sagaciously. "Go."

And then, down the West Gulch the procession moved—Montana leading the advance, the two braves close to his side, the points of their keen-edged knives within an inch of his chest.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BEAUTY IS A FAULT SOMETIMES.

"You make me strange even to the dispositions that I owe."

"YES, that is the name, Campbell—Mortimer Campbell! Oh! how I hate that man!" Mercedes exclaimed, with white lips.

Never before had Major Germaine seen the girl so agitated.

Campbell and his daughter had quietly walked past the humble shop, little thinking what a commotion their unannounced arrival in the wonderful city of Deadwood had created in a single heart.

"Oh, you know this Mr. Campbell, then?"

"Yes; only too well."

"Indeed!"

"It was to escape from his persecutions that I came to this wild region."

"Is that possible?" The major was astonished.

"Yes, I was born and brought up in the same village in which he resides; he and my father were great friends, and when I became old enough to receive attentions, this miserable old wretch actually wanted me to marry him!" the girl exclaimed, with curling nostrils.

"A very natural thing on his part!" the soldier remarked, complacently, switching the leg of his pantaloons with the light cane he carried, and gazing with admiration into the fresh, fair, earnest face of the girl.

"Do you think so? And he has a daughter older than I am!"

"Yes, and she is what a wild Westerner would call 'a perfect screamer.' I was in Washington a few days last winter while she was there, and there were few belles in the capital who could equal her. They say, too, that she is as smart as she is handsome."

"I never could see her beauty!" Mercedes exclaimed, contemptuously.

"Oh, come now, she is handsome! there is no mistake about that. By-the-way, why is it you girls are always so jealous of each other?"

"I am not jealous of her."

"But you won't admit that she is handsome?"

"She may be what you gentlemen would call handsome; so is a cat or tiger to those who like such animals," Mercedes replied, coldly.

"By Jove! it wouldn't do for you and Miss Campbell to be rivals!" the major exclaimed; "there would be hair-pulling, sure!"

"Oh, no!" and a smile dimpled the pretty face of the girl. "If I liked a gentleman, and he should hesitate between my humble self and Miss Campbell, I would freely resign him."

"What an independent little lady you are!"

"Yes, but we are talking nonsense: such a thing can never happen."

"Well, I don't know about that," the soldier said, gravely. "How do you know that I am not an admirer of Miss Campbell?"

"Perhaps you are," Mercedes returned, skillfully pretending not to understand the major's meaning.

"Well, then, in that case—"

"I wish you every possible success, and I hope that you will send me a bit of the wedding-cake!" exclaimed the girl, merrily.

"Take care how you provoke me or I'll start the Honorable Mr. Campbell after you," retorted the soldier.

"Oh, I'm not much afraid of him here! This is not Illinois,

and although the Honorable Mr. Campbell may be a very great creature, indeed, at home, here he will find that neither his money nor position will benefit him much. I think that I have friends in Deadwood who will not allow me to be persecuted."

"I trust that you will call upon me if this gentleman troubles you at all," and the major spoke gravely.

"Thank you, major. I shall not forget your kindness," the girl responded, in her simple way, which apparently said so much, but which in reality said so little.

"Well, adieu for the present; may I come and see you again, this afternoon?"

"While my shop is open I am always glad to see customers," she replied, smiling, and the soldier bowed himself out, complacently flattering himself that Mercedes was growing kinder.

"I shall win her, after all!" the major thought, as he strolled off down the street. "Hang this Montana! If he were only out of the way! By Jove! if I catch him gambling with any of my men, I'll fix him!" and with many a cunning plan weaving in his brain, the persevering suitor walked on.

And Mercedes, within her humble abode, gazed after the trim form of the carefully-attired soldier, with a sad smile upon her pretty face.

"The man loves me," she murmured, "and yet there is something about him that inspires me with a secret terror. I cannot understand it at all. He has never given me any reason to fear him, but has always acted like a brother. In time to come he may be of great service to me, but I can never pay him as he wishes to be paid. Love! I cannot understand the meaning of the word; to me it is but a hollow mockery. A dreadful task I have taken upon myself, but for the sake of the dead and gone, I must fulfill it."

The entrance of a customer put an end to the girl's meditations.

"Good-mornin', marm!" ejaculated the big, brawny-fisted, red shirted giant, who had entered. "I want a cigar, an' the best that you have got in the b'lin'. I reckon that you don't know me, but you will, ef you treat me well, fur I'm goin' to stay some time in this yere town. My name is Bludsoe—Jimmus Bludsoe—own cousin to the engineer of the Per-a-rie Belle; I reckon you've heard of him! He was a tearer, I tell yer! Say! how much fur a handful of them?" and Mr. Bludsoe pointed to a box of long cigars in the show-case.

"Twenty-five cents apiece."

"Do you gin five fur a dollar?"

"Oh, no!"

The bull-whacker took out a silver trade-dollar and spun it up into the air, caught it dextrously as it came down, and closed his horny palm over it.

"Say, marm, I'll go you odd or even fur a cigar!" he exclaimed, with a beaming smile.

Mercedes was pretty well used to strange customers, but this fellow was by far the strangest that she had ever seen.

"Oh, no, sir; I don't wish to do that."

"That's 'cos you're a woman. Ef you had bin a man, you would have hopped right up at the chance. Thar ain't no fun in the feminine gander! But you can't help it, marm; it ain't your fault—you were born so. Say, I'll give you a dollar to let me take a grab out of the box—many as I kin git in my fist," and Bludsoe displayed his broad hand, which seemed fully big enough to grasp a dozen at the least.

"Oh, no; I'm afraid that would be a bad bargain for me."

"You ain't got the least bit of fun in you!" he exclaimed. "I don't make the offer 'cos I'm short of money, but jest fur the fun of the thing. Money! I 'spise it—I own four gold mines, an' my uncle's got an interest in an Indian contract. Money! Why, 'tain't to me more'n water. Say! I'll gin you a quarter fur two on 'em."

"Twenty-five cents apiece; no less."

"You ain't on a speculation, are you?" grumbled the giant. "Wa-al, gin me the 'biggest an' strongest one of the lot!" and he tossed a silver quarter on the counter.

Mercedes submitted the box for his inspection, and after a great deal of examination, accompanied by a running fire of remarks in regard to the dearth of the article, Mr. Bludsoe chose a cigar.

Drawing from his pocket an envelope, with a letter inclosed, he tore it lengthways in two and stuck one half into the flame of the little lamp which was kept burning on the counter for the accommodation of smokers, and then proceeded to light the cigar.

The folded paper rather smouldered than burned, and the attempt was a failure.

Casting down the charred mass, the bull-whacker tried the other half.

"Open it, then it will burn," Mercedes said, impatient at the clumsiness of the giant; and taking the paper from his hand, she opened it, then deftly twisted it up again and applied it to the flame.

It blazed up readily now, and as Mercedes held it up to the man her eyes caught sight of the writing.

An exclamation of surprise came from her lips, and she hastily threw it to the floor and placed her foot upon it to extinguish the flame.

"Oh, it will never light!" she said. "Here, take some matches!"

With many thanks, the rough fellow unsuspectingly stalked out, leaving the girl in possession of a prize.

At last she had a clue!



## CHAPTER XIII.

## SILVER SAM.

"E'en such a man drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night."

NORTHWARD of Deadwood city was an almost unbroken wilderness, the home of the white deer, the haunt of that loping outcast—the great gray wolf.

The fierce, wary and ruthless red-man also claimed ownership, and disputed title with the wild game and the savage beasts which preyed upon them.

But Deadwood—magic city of the Western wilderness!—had presented so bold a front, had stricken the painted warriors so many sturdy blows, that the wily red chiefs now thought twice before they approached within sight of the smoke rising on the air from Deadwood's fires.

Good hunting, therefore, attended with but small danger of a surprise by the Sioux braves, was to be found a short distance north of the town.

And so, on game intent, bright and early one morning, a callow youth, with gun on shoulder, sallied forth from the shadows of Deadwood and took his way to the north.

He was a tall, angular stripling, hardly a man and yet beyond the halcyon days of boyhood.

Tim Bunter, the "deacon's" right-hand man, was well known to all the inhabitants of Deadwood; half the time he presided over the post-office, and from the peculiar, simple expression ever to be found upon his homely features he had acquired the nickname of "Greeny."

Not to know "Greeny" of the post-office was at once to confess yourself a stranger to Deadwood and its notabilities.

For once in his life the deacon had waxed kind and given Tim a half-holiday. Until twelve at noon he was his own master and free to go where he listed.

Quite a number of deer had lately been killed within a mile or two of the town, and Tim, fired with a desire to emulate the deeds of the lucky miners who had complacently displayed the trophies of their skill, in the shape of sundry pairs of deer-horns, in the saloons of the city, to the gaze of an admiring crowd, borrowed a gun of a friendly neighbor and started forth on spoils intent.

After getting fairly clear of the town, Tim had struck off to the right, following an old Indian trail leading up the valley.

A couple of miles on the trail crossed a little brook, running clear and fresh from the hills above, and in the vicinity of the brook many deer had been killed.

Tim kept a wary eye about him, but neither hoof nor head did he see until he came to where the trail crossed the brook.

He had approached the spot very cautiously—it was a little open glade—for he expected to see deer feeding by the side of the stream, and he had listened to too many hunters' tales, spun by the hour within the sacred precincts, of the post-office, not to be aware of the keen sense of hearing possessed by the nimble-footed, hairy-coated wildwood prince.

As quietly as a cat stealing in upon a nibbling mouse, Tim advanced down the little rising ground leading to the open glade; his eyes as big as saucers and his heart thumping against his ribs loud enough, as he believed, to scare every bird or beast within a mile at least.

He had drawn back the hammers of the double-barreled gun he carried, heavily charged with buckshot, and with finger on trigger he glared down into the glade, through which ran the pretty stream, upon reaching the fringe of small timber which marked the edge of the woodland.

No deer were in the glade, but, just beyond the open space, in the bushes, stood a noble buck.

Tim was so nervous that he fairly trembled as though suddenly taken with an ague fit.

He could see nothing of the deer but the tall, branching horns, and from the way in which these appeared, it was plain that the beast was standing broadside to the glade.

Just one single instant Tim glared, and then he pulled the trigger—or triggers, to write correctly—for Tim, in his agitation, fired both barrels at once. As he, in his desire to do certain execution, had used double the quantity of both powder and shot requisite, the result was a noise like a miniature clap of thunder and a recoil of the butt, which knocked the unlucky sportsman over backward as if he had been shot.

For the moment Tim saw more stars than any telescope has yet discovered.

Fully a minute he lay flat on his back, blinking up at the sky in a most wonderful manner, and then, slowly beginning to realize that he wasn't killed outright, although nearly scared to death, he picked himself up.

And when he was fairly on his feet the first objects which met his eyes were the branching horns of the stag shining in the bushes in exactly the same position which they had occupied when he had first caught sight of them!

Now this was really wonderful, for Tim had put shot enough into the clump of bushes which concealed the deer's body to have ended the career of a dozen horned monarchs.

So Tim thought, but before he had time to reflect upon the subject, into the open glade, from behind the shelter of a sturdy pine, stepped a figure which made Tim wish that his gun was recharged with the buck-shot—a tall figure dressed all in black, with a peaked hat and dangling cloak, and the face covered with a half-mask, completely concealing the features.

At the first glance the horrified eyes of Tim believed that it was a skeleton which had come striding so unceremoniously out of the bushes, for the tight-fitting black dress of the masked man was curiously painted so as to give the idea of a skeleton.

But it was a mortal hand which wielded the heavy revolver pointed directly at the breast of the unlucky sportsman, and it was the voice of a human which cried:

"Throw up your hands, young man, or I'll drill a hole right through you!"

Keen-witted was Greeny, for all his apparent greenness, but not at all brave.

He understood now the trick of the pair of horns adroitly placed in the bushes to draw his fire and thus render him an easy prey to the wild marauder, but he had no thought, armed or unarmed, of offering resistance to the demands of the mysterious mask, so down he jumped on his knees and yelled in terror:

"Take all I've got but spare my life!"

"Any other we'pons?" asked the stranger, gruffly.

"No, nuthin' but a jack-knife, good mister—"

"Sam—Silver Sam! that is my handle!" the mask exclaimed.

"I own all this hyer region, an' I don't allow no fellers to shoot guns round hyer!"

"But I didn't know it, Mister Sam—"

"Silver Sam!" cried the unknown, fiercely.

"Yes, Silver Sam!"

"Have you got anything to say afore I 'pull' on ye?" the outlaw asked, grimly.

"You ain't a-goin' to kill me?"

"That's my programme!"

"No, no, don't!" yelled Tim, in an agony of fear. "I'll give you everything I've got—my jack-knife an' two dollars I've got in my pocket—an' the gun—it's only borrowed, but you kin have it all the same!"

"Anythin' more?" growled the road-agent, for such he evidently was.

"No, that's all I've got."

"Tain't enuff!" and again the masked man made a motion as though about to pull the trigger of the weapon.

"Hol' on! don't shoot!" Tim was being frightened out of a year's growth.

"Oh, I must!"

"No, no; I've got twenty dollars hid away in the post-office, an' you kin have it all!"

"In the post-office?" and the road-agent appeared to be astonished.

"Yes, in the post-office."

"What have you got to do with the post-office?"

"Why, I live there; I'm Mr. Black's clerk—Deacon Black, you know; I take care of the post-office for him."

"You do?"

"Yes, honest; don't kill me an' I'll do anything for you!"

"Well, I will make a bargain with you if you run the post-office, and will agree to do exactly as I tell you," the road-agent said, slowly.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A BARGAIN.

"Content in faith; I'll seal to such a bond."

"Oh! I'll agree to anything!" the unhappy Tim protested.

"Will you?"

"Oh, yes, anything, if you will only spare my life!" The post-office clerk would willingly agree to anything to escape the peril which threatened him. A proposition looking to the murder of the deacon, and the general plunder of his goods, he was quite prepared to accede to, but shrewdly calculated that, once safe out of this scrape in Deadwood city, he could laugh at the road-agent.

"You have charge of the post-office, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you see all the letters that pass through the post?"

"Yes, sir." Tim guessed at once that the road-agent had his eyes upon the mail, though what he expected to gain by tampering with that was quite beyond Tim's comprehension.

"Now, then, let us fully understand each other," and the road-agent advanced to within a yard of the kneeling clerk.

Tim was curious enough, despite his fear, to endeavor to get a good look at the stranger's face, so as to be able to recognize him when they should meet.

The half mask nearly concealed the features, and all that Tim could discover was a clear-cut chin shaded by an enormous drooping mustache. Such a mustache Tim had never seen before, but he would know that hirsute ornament again if his eyes ever fell upon it.

"You are quite willing to do anything?"

"Oh, yes, anything I kin," Tim replied, "'cept murder, or somethin' of that sort."

"You needn't trouble your head about that; I'll do all the murdering required!" the road-agent replied, with a ferocity plainly apparent in his voice that fairly made Tim shiver in his boots.

"Ye—ye—yes," the boy stuttered.

"Look at that!" and from some secret pocket the stranger produced a little scrap of paper, that looked like the fragment of a letter.

Upon the scrap a few words were traced in a clerkly hand, evidently penned by a man's fingers.

"DEADWOOD CITY, January 20th.

"DEAR JULIET:—I shall probably remain here for some time, therefore come at—"

Such were the words traced upon the paper, evidently the beginning of a letter.

Tim's wondering eyes devoured the brief and broken sentence, and then turned in astonishment to gaze upon the face of the road-agent.

"You have read it?"

"Yes, sir."



"Did you ever see any writing like this?"

Tim shook his head, doubtfully.

"You don't think that you ever did?"

"No, I don't think that I ever saw any writing like that."

"You would be apt to remember it, wouldn't you, if you had ever seen it?"

"I bet yer!" the boy exclaimed, promptly. "It's a bully hand; jest like copper-plate!"

And in truth the broken sentence was written most excellently.

"You see all the letters that pass through the post-office?"

"Yes, every one on 'em. I stamp all them that goes out, and I gives out all that comes in."

"And if you had ever seen a letter with writing on it like this, you would be pretty sure to have remembered it?"

"Oh, yes, sure as shootin'! I knowed I never seed any writing like this here before."

"And yet the man that wrote that sentence is in Deadwood."

"Mebbe he is," the boy admitted, "but I reckon he don't write no letters, else I would have seen 'em."

"Well, this is the bargain I have to propose to you," the road-agent said, abruptly. "I've got you foul, now, and I could kill you jest as easy as not!"

Tim trembled at the savage words.

"And you ain't got plunder enough to buy your life off, for twenty dollars is only a flea-bite to me."

"But it's all I've got!" protested Tim.

"I can't help that!" the stranger answered, roughly. "That is your misfortune and not my fault. When I light down onto a man I kinder reckon that he ought to pan out about forty or fifty dollars at the least, and, you see, you are way under that mark. Why, I wouldn't make a decent living if I struck such 'leads' as you all the time."

"A fellow can't give more'n he's got," whined Tim.

"True for you; that's solid hoss sense!" the road-agent observed, approvingly. "And now, to come right down to solid business. I want to find the man who wrote on this piece of paper. He's in Deadwood, somewhar. In time he'll write a letter to somebody, and that letter will come through the post-office; then you get your hooks on it—put it in your pocket and bring it to me—"

"But that would be robbing the mail!" Tim exclaimed.

"Yes, that's true; but I don't want to keep the letter, young feller; I only want to look at it—to have it my hands for an hour or two, and then I'll give it back to you."

"But if I got caught?"

"How are you going to get caught, you fool?" ejaculated the masked man, roughly. "I s'pose that you have got sense enough in that noddle of your'n not to put your hooks on it when thar's anybody around?"

"Yes, mebbe," Tim replied, doubtfully.

"Thar's no mebbe about it!" cried the road-agent, sternly.

"You kin do it as easy as fallin' off a log, if you'll try it, and I'll do the right thing by you, too. Jest you put a letter in my fist, with writing on it like the writing on this bit of paper, and I'll give you twenty dollars!"

Tim's eyes sparkled; twenty dollars was a small fortune to him.

"But if I got cotched?" he said, hesitatingly.

"Well, that's your look-out; you can't expect to get twenty dollars for nothing."

"And you'll give the letter back to me afterwards?"

"Inside of two hours after you place it in my hands you can have it again."

"Well, I'll do it!" Tim exclaimed, suddenly. "'Tain't a hang-in' matter, anyway!"

"Right, you are, young man!" the road-agent exclaimed, in a tone of approbation. "You'll be a man yet, if you grow and don't meet with any pull-backs."

"But where will I find you, s'posin' I get hold of the right letter?" asked Tim.

The masked man appeared to be reflecting; for it was a minute or two before he spoke.

"You know the West Gulch?" he demanded at last.

"Yes."

"Did you ever notice a hollow oak tree just this side of the Little Montana mine?"

"Yes, I guess so," the boy replied, evidently a little doubtful on this point. "I kin easy find it anyway, can't I?"

"Oh, yes, no trouble about that; you can't miss the spot if you look for it."

"That I'll do, sure."

"Well, the moment you get your fingers on that letter you tart as soon as you can for the West Gulch and drop the letter in the hole in the oak-tree. That's my post-office, Silver Sam's letter-box; or if you don't get the letter and want to see me any time a note dropped thar will reach me."

"But how about the twenty dollars, s'posin' I git the letter?" asked Tim, anxiously. He had a keen eye to the main chance.

"You'll have to trust to my honesty for that, my little man," the road-agent replied, "but, as a token that I'm not on the beat, hyer's ten in advance." And with the word the road-agent produced a shining eagle and placed the coin in Tim's hand.

The sight of the gold piece made the eyes of the boy sparkle.

"Mind your eye, now," the mask continued, "and don't breathe a word of this to any living soul, for if you try to play me false I'll cut your heart in twain though you fled to the end of the world."

The boy shivered.

"Now close your eyes for a minute or two."

Tim did as he was bid and when he opened them again the stranger was gone and nothing but the scrap of paper remained.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE RIDE BY NIGHT.

MONTANA had caught at the chance for a respite offered as a drowning man clutches at straws, although he had no idea of how he should get out of the scrape. He had hoped by his prompt acceptance of the offer of the red-skins to disarm their suspicions and so secure the use of his arms again, but the wily red braves were not to be caught napping.

And while the little procession was moving—gliding like grim phantoms down the gorge—Montana racked his brains to discover some method of escape from the trap into which he had fallen.

But, 'twas all in vain. The savages closely encompassed him and were on their guard.

The party arrived in front of the shanty. The dog within growled ominously, evidently having scented the strangers.

The Painted Snake pointed to the door and by gesture signified to Montana that the time had come for him to perform his part.

Two steps Montana took, but the two Indians by his side kept step with him, and the miner saw that it would be impossible for him to carry out the idea which had suddenly flashed upon him. He had intended, upon reaching the door, to cry out to Hallowell to open, trusting to get inside before the savages could reach the spot.

But it was plain that this could not be done, and so Montana suddenly wheeled about and resolutely shook his head.

The Painted Snake came up to him with rapid, but noiseless steps.

"Will my brudder not knock?" he said in a hoarse whisper, wherein rage was plainly written.

Defiantly Montana shook his head.

With a sudden motion the Indian chief drew back his arm, leveling the glittering lance full at the heart of the miner, and at the same instant the two savages by Montana's side seized him with a grip of iron.

Many times before in the course of his adventurous life Montana had met death face to face, but never nearer than now.

A single cry he knew would bring the lion-hearted son of the old Maine State to his assistance, but what avail would that be, except to expose Hallowell to almost certain death, without chance of rescue for himself? And so Montana crushed the instinct to cry for help, springing so freely in his heart, and with a calm brow faced the painted chief and the lance-head, glistening in the moonlight.

"White brudder no speak—die!" hissed the savage from between his clenched teeth, while his face took on the aspect of a demon.

Again Montana shook his head and with a calm face waited for the death-stroke.

The muscles in the brawny, bare arm of the chief seemed to swell as he poised the spear in air, pointed directly at the unprotected breast of the pinioned miner.

"No speak—die!" again the Indian cried in a whisper.

Montana replied not either by word or look, but there was a stern glitter in his eyes that meant nothing but ill to the Sioux warrior. Deeds not words would have been Montana's answer had fortune been more propitious and given him a chance to try conclusions on equal terms with the brawny, muscular, short-legged red-man.

And then, just as Montana was expecting the death-stroke, there came a sudden change in the programme.

With a muttered curse the Painted Snake dropped the lance-head to the ground, made a single motion to the rest of the band, a sign evidently well understood, for with marvelous quickness they all faced to the right about, and with their prisoner—who had no choice but to go with his captors—marched rapidly up the valley, stealing away with the same stealthy tread that the wild beast uses when on the search for prey.

Up the West Gulch the party went until the open country beyond was reached.

At the head of the gulch, corralled in a clump of timber and guarded by a single warrior, were the horses of the band.

The Sioux are a "horse Indian" tribe; they never trust to their own legs if a four-footed beast can be procured.

Montana now understood why he had been spared. It was the intention of the Indians to take him to their village so that his dying agonies might afford sport for a multitude.

The red chiefs placed the white man astride of a pony, and, after binding his ankles together underneath the horse's belly loosened the lashings on his wrists so that he could manage the reins.

And, after they were all in the saddle, Montana saw to his astonishment, for he was well acquainted with the Indian customs, that the horse he rode was a spare animal.

Had the red-men then expected to capture a white prisoner that they took the trouble to bring an extra horse along?

Fairly in the saddle the Painted Snake uttered a sharp, quick command, and then away to the northward rode the band.

Again hope had sprung up in Montana's breast.

Death had faced him grimly but a few moments previous, but now the stern king of terrors had retreated into the dim distance, and the miner began to plan and plot for an escape.

His ankles were securely bound under the belly of the sure-footed, shaggy-coated pony, whose rudely-cropped mane stood upright like the teeth of a saw, but the fastenings of his wrists had been loosened so that he could easily free his hands by slipping one wrist through the loop; but he was guarded right and left by two stout warriors, who, with carbines—the spoils of some unlucky detachment of Uncle Sam's boys-in-blue—kept a watchful eye upon him.



If he could only succeed in getting his legs free Montana felt that there might be a chance of escaping from the snare into which he had fallen.

Carefully and dextrously then Montana rubbed one leg against the other, endeavoring to loosen the deer-skin lashings.

The Indians had not been over particular about the fastenings, and the captive white, to his great joy, felt that the bonds were becoming looser.

And then, just as Montana made this discovery, the Painted Snake, with a sharp ejaculation, halted the band and in the Indian tongue bade the two warriors riding by the side of the prisoner fasten the bridles of their horses to his.

Montana saw at once that the game was up; the wary chieftain was resolved that the prey he had captured so easily should not escape for want of precaution.

The warriors obeyed the command. The bridles were tied together and then again the band rode on.

They left the broken, foothill-like country and came into as fair a prairie vale as ever Montana's eyes had looked upon—one of the beautiful valleys so peculiar to the Black Hills, wanting but the presence of the white man's seeds and hands to blossom like a garden with a golden harvest.

After passing through the valley they crossed quite a large creek, and Montana, pretty well acquainted with the lay of the land, guessed that it was one of the northern branches of the North Fork of the Cheyenne river.

The creek forded, another pleasant valley appeared.

The moon was still giving forth her bounteous light, although morning was near at hand, and by the aid of Madam Luna's lamp, Montana could plainly distinguish that through this valley also ran a small stream, and at the upper end of the fertile vale was an Indian village.

The miner was astonished, for he had no idea that any Indian encampment was located so near to Deadwood.

And a large encampment it was, too, for Montana had spent many years in the Indian country, and, as quick as the red-man himself, could read signs in the running brooks, and sermons in stones.

The number of the lodges—wick-e-ups, or tepees, to use all the genuine terms for the skin-covered huts of the red warriors—is always a sure indication of the strength of the village.

"Sioux?" asked Montana, of the Indian who rode on his right, and indicating the village as he spoke.

"Um, Sioux," replied the brave.

"What chief?"

"Big chief," answered the Indian; "heap fight—many scalps—Sitting Bull."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A RED KING.

THE name of Sitting Bull was well known to Montana, although he had never, knowingly, met the warrior, and yet he had mingled much with the wild tribes of the north-west, but by reputation he was well acquainted with the red chief.

A distinguished brave of one of the wildest branches of the many divisioned Sioux nation, he had early distinguished himself by his uncompromising hatred of the whites.

No more bitter foe had the miner-emigrants of the Black Hills than the Sioux chieftain, whose totem was a sitting bull.

Little mercy then could Montana expect at the hands of the red wolf whose proudest boast was that he had dyed his hands crimson in the blood of slaughtered white men.

As the party rode into the village the captive noticed that pickets were thrown out to guard against a surprise, in regular military style; and this seemed to confirm the reports that Montana had heard regarding Sitting Bull's abilities as a military leader.

Old Indian-fighters had predicted that the chief of the bull totem would give the government more trouble than any red devil in the north-west, and it was even currently reported and often believed, that the Sioux chieftain was a white man in disguise. Indeed one account went so far as to affirm that Sitting Bull was not only a white man but that he had been educated at West Point, and had worn the straps of rank which Uncle Sam gives to his military sons.

The name of the man was even given—Lieutenant So-and-so, graduated at West Point in '59—was assigned to a command in the south-west—became involved in a drunken quarrel, thus disgracing himself and the uniform he wore, absconded by night to avoid the consequences of his indiscretion, and sought concealment among the Indians, passing gradually from tribe to tribe until at last becoming one of the Sioux nation.

This story was commonly believed, and it was even said that the old-time United States cadet had been recognized by a schoolmate, now an officer stationed on the frontier, and that the semi-savage had not attempted to deny his identity.

Be these stories truth or falsehood, Sitting Bull himself was a reality, and a bloody one he had proved on several occasions.

The village seemed asleep, with the exception of the sentinels, and the entrance of the horsemen into it excited no commotion.

At this fact Montana's surprise was roused.

The return of a war-party with a prisoner is always heralded to the village by the first picket lucky enough to catch sight of the triumphant approach, and then, in the midst of a general uproar, the victors are received.

But now all was as quiet as the grave. The Indian pickets

took no more notice of the party than if it had been a group of hunters returning with the carcass of a deer thrown across a pony, rather than with a bound and helpless white prisoner.

Before a large wigwam in the center of the village the horsemen stopped; the Indians dismounted, unfastened the lashings which bound Montana's feet together and took him off his horse.

With a significant gesture the Painted Snake pointed to the door of the skin lodge.

Montana understood the meaning of the motion; the lodge was to be his prison-house, and so, realizing the uselessness of resistance, he entered it.

A rag burning in a dish of fat—a primitive candle common to the wilderness—gave forth a faint light which dimly illuminated the interior of the lodge; although it barely more than made the darkness visible, to use the old saying; yet when his eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, Montana could plainly distinguish everything around him.

In one corner was a couch of skins, the only furniture the apartment boasted. True Spartans are your red braves, and disdain the luxuries of civilization.

The long ride had stiffened Montana's limbs, and though he boasted a frame of iron, yet he was glad to stretch himself upon the soft buffalo robes, and seek the rest that nature craved.

Thanks to the savage who had loosened the leather cord which had confined his wrists, Montana easily freed his hands from the bonds, so that he could sleep with unfettered limbs.

Vague thoughts of an escape had passed through Montana's mind, but for the present he knew that it would be useless to attempt it.

A cordon of sentinels were drawn around the lodge, for he had distinctly heard the Painted Snake give the commands, all of which he understood.

One thing puzzled Montana.

Why had the red braves taken so much pains to make him a prisoner without harming him, and why had he been received in the village in a manner so unlike the general custom of receiving a prisoner?

And while speculating upon these points the miner fell fast asleep, and in his disordered dreams fought the battles of the night over again.

Fifteen—twenty minutes had Montana been bound in slumber's chain, when, through the door of the lodge, pushing aside the skin that veiled it, peered the oddly-disfigured face of the Painted Snake.

His keen eyes—almost cat-like in their power of seeing in the dark, easily discerned by the aid of the flickering light afforded by the rag in the pan of grease, that the miner slept soundly.

"He sleeps," said the chief, speaking in his native tongue and evidently addressing some one behind him on the outside of the hut.

"Soundly?" asked a deep and measured voice, in the same language.

"Yes."

"Enter."

The Painted Snake entered and courteously held aside the hanging skin so that the speaker might pass freely into the wigwam.

Then into the lodge stepped a tall, well-knit and muscular savage; a man of middle age, and evidently a chief of note to judge from the richness of the dress he wore.

The most noteworthy thing about his person—he was dressed after the fashion of the red-men in deer-skin shirt and leggings, with a richly-embroidered blanket pendent from his shoulders—was a pair of silver-mounted revolvers stuck in the belt that girded in his waist—as handsome a pair of weapons as the eyes of a soldier would care to look upon.

"Lo! the poor Indian, with his untutored mind," fights no more with the old-time bow and arrows, but meets and—sad to relate! oftentimes beats Uncle Sam's blue-coats, armed with breech-loaders, latest style revolvers, and, in fact, arms of all kinds of the newest patterns.

'Tis not every government that will allow its enemies to purchase arms of its own citizens by means of which to kill its soldiers.

With a noiseless step the chief strode across the wigwam and peered into the face of the sleeping man.

"Good! It is he!" he exclaimed, with an accent of satisfaction plainly visible in his voice.

"The chief described him so well that I could not mistake him."

"Did he offer resistance?"

"No; he had no chance; we sprung upon him so quick that he had no time to use either teeth or claws."

"The service shall not be forgot; no better warrior in all the Sioux nation than my brother, the Painted Snake."

The brave bowed gravely at the compliment, evidently much pleased, and then the two withdrew.

Soundly Montana slept until the rosy light of dawn lit up the east, and "jocund day stood tiptoed on the misty mountain tops!"

With a start Montana awoke and glared around him at the narrow walls of his prison-house.

And then, just as he had begun to work in his brain plans of escape, through the door into the lodge stalked a tall and haughty chief.

It was the same warrior who had visited him in company with the Painted Snake.

"Red Oak!" cried Montana, recognizing him on the instant.

"No, Sitting Bull, the great chief of the Sioux nation!"



## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE CHIEFTAIN'S SCHEME.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Montana, in wonder.  
 "As true as that the Cheyenne runs into the Missouri," replied the Indian.

"And your name is not Red Oak, then?"

"No; I deceived you when we met on the plains of Laramie."

Both speakers were using the Indian language, which, as we have before mentioned, Montana spoke fluently.

"Well, chief, I am a prisoner here in your hands; what are you going to do with me?"

"Save you from death," replied the Indian, laconically.

"Indeed! How?"

"The Black Hills belong to the Sioux nation."

"Yes."

"The white man has trampled the feeding-grounds of our game under foot, polluted the clear water of our rivers, and the smoke of their lodges offends the eyes of the red-men."

"True; I can understand that."

"The chiefs of the Sioux nation have not sold the Black Hills to the Great Father at Washington—will not sell the Black Hills, though the white man should cover them with blankets and pile their gold and silver money upon them until the heaps would cover the horns of the wild elk!" exclaimed the Indian, in an outburst of passion.

"So I have heard."

"And your ears heard true. Are the red chiefs dogs that they should squeal and fly because the white man, who burrows in the earth like a blind rat, wants the land?"

"I have understood that your chiefs refuse to sign the treaty."

"Sign the treaty which sweeps away the Black Hills from the Sioux nation!" cried the Indian, loftily. "Yes, we will sign it with the scalping-knife and seal it with the leaden bullet, red with white men's blood."

"But, if I understand the matter rightly, some of the chiefs are willing to agree to the sale," Montana observed.

"Yes, it is true; some are willing to sell; dogs that they are! they would sell their souls for a drink of the white fire-water of the trader; but the real chiefs of the nation will not sell, and the Great Father at Washington must drive the white miners from the Black Hills."

Montana shook his head.

"He will not do it!" cried the Indian, fiercely.

"He cannot do it, chief; the miners have flocked in in such numbers that it would take a big army to dislodge them, and the country—the white men's country—would never sanction it."

"Are treaties nothing—nothing but tricks to cheat—to fool away the red-man's land?"

"They claim that the treaty has expired."

"Perhaps it has," replied the Indian, slowly; "they say one thing and write another. They make fair promises, break them, and then complain when we fly to war."

"But, chief, excuse my interrupting you: one thing I cannot understand."

"What is it?"

"Why, when we hunted together on the plains of Laramie you called yourself Red Oak and said that you were a member of the Brule Sioux?"

"My white brother then has a good memory?"

"Yes."

"He remembers the time when one blanket covered two—when a red chief came to the lodge of the white hunter, cold and hungry, and was warmed and fed?"

"Yes, it is not so long ago that I should forget it."

"Sitting Bull will not forget it, either."

"And yet I am a prisoner in your village."

"My brother is wise; old head, young shoulders; suppose Sitting Bull had sent a message to the white lodges that he wished to see his friend; would the white man have dared to have trusted himself in the hands of the warriors who thirst for the blood of the pale-faces as the hungry wolf thirsts for the blood of the halting buffalo?"

Montana shook his head.

"My brother would not have come."

"No; not at a message from Sitting Bull, but if Red Oak had sent for me I should have come."

"Moons have come and gone," replied the chief; "how did the red warrior know that the memory of his brother was not like the sands of the river, to be washed clean at every flood?"

"But you have not explained to me why you deceived me in regard to your name when we first met."

"Sitting Bull had fought the blue-coated chiefs to the north on the Yellowstone—had taken many scalps and then had been deserted by his tribe because he had made war and fought for what was rightly his. The dogs crawled before the feet of the white chiefs and promised to deliver their brother into the hands of his enemies that he might be hanged by a rope like a brute. Then Sitting Bull changed his name and fled to the south. Faint and weary, sore-footed, in the snow, he came to the lone lodge and found shelter."

"Ah! I understand now; and after the trouble blew over you rejoined your tribe again?"

"No; Sitting Bull never went back to his tribe," replied the chief, an accent of sadness in his voice. "Never more would he dwell in the same village with the false hearts who would rather crouch like dogs before the whites than strike them in the face with a warrior's hand, as a true brave should do. He pitched his lodge alone and then some few braves joined him; outcasts like himself from their tribes. Little by little the band grew, until at last no chief in all the nation could boast a better following. Eternal war to the whites was the watchword; no

peace, treaty or no treaty! Not a red chief from the iron wagon-way to the great North woods but knows that when he seeks a war-trail it has to be found by joining Sitting Bull. In the winter my young men are good Indians; they go into the Reservation and draw their supplies, half-blankets where the treaty calls for whole ones, rotten meat, flour not fit to cook, beef-cattle so poor that they cannot stand upon their feet—all his, everything; but they get powder and ball, new guns and knives, and when the spring comes they sneak off on their ponies, join me and then we take the war-trail. If it were not for the 'good Indians' being fed in the winter when the snow lies deep and we have difficulty in getting feed for our ponies, we 'wild Indians' could not hold out as we do."

No fiction, reader, this speech of the wily Sioux, but sober, actual truth. The Government feeds the "bucks" in winter and in the spring, the moment the grass grows up enough to afford subsistence for their ponies, away they go on the war-trail against the hapless emigrant or the scantily-defended frontier post.

"And if the Government will not remove the white miners from the Black Hills, what then?"

"Then the rifle and scalping-knife must do their work!" replied the chief, fiercely.

Montana laughed, much to the astonishment of the red-skin, who looked inquiringly at him, as if to learn the reason of the untimely mirth.

"Chief, did you ever see a buffalo bull butt his head against a rock?"

The Indian shook his head.

"Well, chief, you and your braves are the buffalo bull and his white men the rock; there are miners enough now in the Black Hills to fight all the Indians west of the big Missouri."

The chief looked incredulous.

"You'll find it is the truth."

"My brother told me that he was alone in the world and that his white kin had not used him well; the red chief thought that perhaps he would become a red-man and join the war-trail."

"And that is why you took all this trouble to bring me here?"

"Yes."

"It is useless, chief; you will fail in your undertaking. You cannot drive the miners from the Black Hills."

"Sitting Bull can die!" answered the Indian, proudly.

"Yes, but why not live, chief?"

"Of what use is it to live as the white man's slave?" the savage asked. "Sitting Bull must die some time; better die on the war-path than in hoeing corn."

And this is the reasoning of the wild son of the far western prairies, always.

Better death, rifle in hand, than life with peaceful toil.

As surely as the sun sinks in the west so surely must the red-man's race be run out as a savage.

Vainly Montana endeavored to convince the chief that his attempt was hopeless; the chief would not be convinced.

Montana partook of the morning meal and then was escorted safely back to the upper end of the West Gulch.

It seemed almost like a dream.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE BULL-WHACKER MAKES A BET.

Just on the outskirts of Deadwood city, a little whitewashed shanty displayed a rudely painted sign, bearing the inscription, "Johnny's Shebang."

Search all Deadwood over and a more disreputable saloon you could not find.

Johnny, the keeper of the place—Johnny Brown as he called himself, though the chances were ten to one that he had borne a dozen different names—was a tall, thick-set, brutal-looking fellow, with every mark of the jail-bird written plainly on his face.

As we have said, no worse place in all the town than Johnny's Shebang, haunted as it was by a gang of broken-down miners, slaves to drink, petty gamblers, always ready to plunder an unwary stranger, and reckless whether they obtained their spoil by cheating the victim at cards, or by knocking him in the head in some dark spot, and vagabonds of every grade.

Not a night in the week without a drunken brawl either in or around the saloon.

Many a time the decent men of the town had calmly discussed the advisability of "clearing out"—to use the terse, expressive westernism—both Johnny's Shebang and Johnny's gang, but, as often happens in such cases, the movement had consisted of all words and no deeds.

And Johnny, too, presented a bold front and had loudly boasted that he'd make it hot for those that tried to interfere with his business, and as he and his gang were popularly supposed to be armed to the teeth, and to hold their lives as lightly as they did their oaths, the quiet, peaceable miners rather shrank from a contest with the desperadoes.

In this life ten brawling, bullying men often rule a hundred.

It was on the very night, in the early part of which the proposal of the Honorable Mortimer Campbell to buy the Little Montana mine had been known to Montana—to give Mr. William Jones his common title—that for the first time we bring the vilest haunt of Deadwood city into our tale. At the hour of nine, the saloon was well filled by a motley gang engaged in smoking, drinking, card-playing, and sundry other games of chance.

Standing in the center of a group by the bar of the saloon was the bull-whacker—on the plains the driver of a mule team is commonly termed a bull-whacker—who had so proudly chal-



lenged quiet Montana to a trial of strength and had been so easily discomfited by the miner.

The Boss Bull-whacker of Shian, as he chiefly delighted to term himself, had soon got on familiar terms with the rough crowd who frequented the saloon, and was engaged in relating sundry wonderful adventures by flood and field to the listening and astonished crowd, each man of which mentally pronounced the "Pet of the Niobrara," Jimmus Bludsoe, to be about the biggest liar that had ever encountered the mud of Deadwood.

In the midst of a tall yarn about a skirmish with the Sioux down on the Laramie trail, where, according to his own account, he, single-handed, had slain a dozen warriors and run twenty more up into the mountains, completely panic-stricken and demoralized, a man stuck his head in at the door, took a glance around the room, and then disappeared.

All through his talking and drinking the giant had kept one eye upon the door, and after the appearance of the head, he suddenly concluded his discourse and bade the crowd "take care" of themselves for a while as he was "gwine down the street."

Then the bull-whacker retreated from the saloon and emerged into the air.

"Ef you're the man I think you air, whar air ye?" he exclaimed, as he stood before the door and looked up and down the street.

"Here," responded a deep voice, and the bull-whacker, guided by the sound, looked toward the upper corner of the shanty, where the shadows seemed darkest, and there beheld the figure of a man.

With his ponderous stride Mr. Bludsoe advanced to the stranger.

"Well, durn my cats! ef I see'd you!" he exclaimed.

The man concealed in the shadow was about the medium hight, wrapped up in a long, loose overcoat, the collar turned up around his throat, evidently for the purpose of a disguise, for the night was not cold; on his head he wore the wide-brimmed felt hat, so common to the westerner, and this was pulled low down over his forehead, so that in the semi-darkness his features were pretty well concealed. From underneath the hat came stray locks of hair seemingly tinged with gray.

"A nice mess you made of it!" the man exclaimed, abruptly, and evidently annoyed, as the giant came up to him.

"Say! what did you want to tell me that thar warn't no fun in that man?" Mr. Bludsoe cried, indignantly, and yet with a pathetic tone plainly apparent in his voice. "Why! he's as full of fun as an egg is of meat! Did you see him pick me up an' sweep the ground with me? Durn my ole mule's tail! ef I ever got more fun for my money since I were born. Chaw my cat's ear off! ef I didn't think the cuss had broken every bone in my body! Why! that man is chockfull of fun—b'ilin' over!"

"Yes, I saw the whole affair, and he handled you as if you had been a child instead of a man nearly twice his size and weight," the stranger responded, tartly.

"Well, he did salivate me fur all I was worth," the bull-whacker admitted. "But, who in thunder would have believed that he had it in him? Blame me ef I know now how he did it. I went for him, intending jes' to pick him up under the arms an' give him a squeeze that would jes' lam the life right out of him, but 'stead of that he picked me up, twisted my head under his arm, gi'n me a grip that nearly broke my neck, and then tossed my heels up in the air, an' threw me around jes' as careless as if I wasn't worth nuthin', nohow, then slammed me down on the flat of my back jes' as ef he was tryin' to make a pile-driver out of me. Fun! that Montana is full of it. Durn my hind-wagon wheels! ef I ever see'd sich a quiet feller turn out so lively since the day I was hatched!"

"You let him catch you at a disadvantage, and he tried a wrestler's trick on you!" the stranger exclaimed, evidently in a state of extreme dissatisfaction.

"Is that so, pilgrim?" cried Mr. Bludsoe, in a tone of wonder. "Well, I knew that he got me foul some way, and now that you have explained it, I feel better. He's a wrastler, eh? Well, I reckon he is! He's jes' chockfull of wrastle an' spilt a leetle of it on me. Say, pilgrim! I see'd more stars when my head made a hole in the dirt arter he fooled with me than I did the time my ole lead mule kicked me, an' then I diskivered planets 'nuff fur four or five sech worlds as this hyer."

"If you had smashed him once with your fist it would have finished him," the tempter suggested.

"Jes' so! I reckon I ought to have done that air, but skin me fur a wagon-kiver, ef I wasn't kinder ashamed to quarrel with a chap that talked so mighty nice an' peaceable," the giant protested. "Ef he had abused me now, called me names, sed that I was a beat, or that I couldn't drive a mule, or that I couldn't drink, or some other sich insult, sich as no gen'laman ought to stan', why then I would have gobbled him for my meat right away. I'm allers ready for fun, I am, fur a bigger-horned, longer-wooled, tougher old ram than I am don't climb any peak from hyer to Wolf Mountain. I'm a snorter when I git a-goin', I tell yer!"

"I rather think you will have some difficulty in persuading the people round here that you amount to much after the way Montana handled you to-night," the stranger observed, sarcastically.

"Pilgrim! do the boys from Oshkosh think that I took water 'cos I let that chap in Injun fixin's fool with me?" asked the bull-whacker, anxiously.

"That is about the size of it."

"Pilgrim! am I a whipped man? Has this hyer Montana cut my comb and drooped my tail-feathers? Kin I not fill myself with long-juice an' yell that I am chief of the ranche, without havin' some pilgrin, to me unknown, sing out Montana?"

"No, sir."

"I owe you ten dollars!" cried the giant, suddenly. "Like a man an' a brother you bet me ten dollars that air Montana was

too heafy fur me, an' you were right. Now I'll bet you twenty that I flax him within a week so that he'll be glad to sneak off when he hears my war-horn an' sees me hump myself for blood an' slaughter!"

"I'll take the bet!" exclaimed the stranger, quickly. "And keep your eyes about you this time!"

"I bet yer!" replied the giant, quickly. "Jimmus Bludsoe is no fool, nohow, ef he is a stranger in these hyer parts. Come in an' h'ist some p'ison!"

The stranger declined the invitation, and bidding Bludsoe good-night, hurried away, leaving the giant free to meditate upon some plan whereby Montana might be discomfited.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### AN ODD REQUEST.

BRIGHT and beautiful the sun shone on the shanties of Deadwood's magic city; noon had passed and the great sun-god had commenced his western descent, heading straight for the giant peaks of the Rocky Mountains and his bed in the waters of the blue Pacific beyond.

Up in the West Gulch Hallowell toiled, extracting the golden grains from the rich lead which Montana had originally struck in the valley.

The absence of his partner had sorely puzzled the honest son of the old Eastern State, although Montana was accustomed to absent himself once in a while, and was chary of vouchsafing an explanation, but Hallowell thought that he understood the matter well enough.

No better judge of "likely" ground was there in the territory than his partner, and therefore it was plain to Hallowell that Montana was quietly "prospecting" for another golden strike further on in the wilderness.

So Hallowell held his tongue and never questioned Montana in regard to his doings.

And while the miner toiled in the stream, Cosco, the dog, kept watch and ward, gravely seated upon the top of a high boulder, a hundred feet or so down the gulch toward the town.

"Pretty near time to quit!" Hallowell observed, striding to the shore and suspending his toil for a moment to glance at the sun, now fast descending in the west.

The dog wagged his stumpy tail at the sound of his master's voice, and seemed with his eyes to blink approval of the miner's observation.

And then, all of a sudden, the dog turned his head to the southward, pricked up his ears, and a low growl came from between his white teeth.

"Sho! what's the matter, hey, beauty?" exclaimed Hallowell, understanding at once from the dog's manner that some stranger was approaching up the valley.

In the miner's eyes the shaggy-coated terrier was a beauty; although in the sight of others ugly as sin itself.

"Bow-wow!" said the dog, sharply.

And then around the angle of the valley came the person whose footfall had excited the dog's watchfulness.

A woman too; slender, handsome Mercedes Kirkley.

Dressed in excellent taste was the girl, and yet attired as plainly as well could be. Nature had been lavish of her gifts as far as Mercedes was concerned, and the adage of "beauty unadorned" could have been plainly proved with Mercedes for an example.

"By gol!" Hallowell exclaimed, as the girl advanced toward him, "if she ain't a hummer, I don't want a cent!"

Even the terrier wagged his stumpy tail and looked less savage as the girl passed by and called him a "good dog."

Both men and brutes felt the charm of Mercedes' presence; the women alone denied her power.

"Good-day, marm," said Hallowell, gallantly removing his old slouch hat and ducking his head profoundly. "Out for a walk?"

"Yes, I am very fond of the romantic wildness of this gulch," she replied.

"And very fond of one of the owners of the principal mine in the gulch," Hallowell was tempted to reply, but being a bashful man he did not dare to joke with the girl.

He noticed the eyes of Miss Kirkley wandering searchingly around and he guessed at once that she was looking for Montana.

"My partner ain't here," he said.

"No?" responded the girl, carelessly, as though it was a matter of no possible interest to her.

"Yes, he went off last night and I haven't seen him since."

"Where has he gone?" Mercedes held a little spray of pine in her hand and she was listlessly picking the spiny points off one by one.

"I don't know, marm. He never said a word as to where he was going. We came back from town about nine o'clock last night and he didn't go into the shanty at all. He said that his head felt hot and that he guessed he had better take a little walk up the gulch and cool off, and I hain't seen him since."

"Do you think that any accident could have befallen him?" and, as she put the question, for the moment, she neglected the plucking of the branch of pine.

"Oh, no, marm!" Hallowell replied, confidently. "I reckon that Montana is old enough and knows enough to take care of himself almost anywhere."

"Have you known your partner very long?" Mercedes asked, seating herself upon a boulder.

"No, marm, not afore I came to this town; we run across each other promiscuous-like. He had jest discovered this claim



here and wanted a partner, and it didn't take us two long to hitch hosses, and a better pard than he is don't breathe this here Western air."

Hallowell was always very much in earnest when Montana was concerned.

"He seems to be a very nice man, but very silent and odd at times," the girl observed, slowly.

The miner felt that the right time had come for him to put in a good word for his partner, and so he proceeded to improve the occasion.

"Well, he ain't much of a talker, but he thinks a heap," he said. "But he's a man, every inch of him, built from the ground upward, and he's got a heart as kind and gentle as a woman's."

"I have heard him called some very hard names," she remarked; "they say that he plays cards and—"

"Why, marm, we all play cards!" Hallowell cried, indignantly. "There ain't hardly a man in town but what plays a little jest to pass the time away."

"But they say that he is nothing but a common gambler."

"I'd like to have a man tell me that!" the miner exclaimed, heatedly. "I reckon that I would massacre him or that he would massacre me if he was big enough afore we got through. Why, marm, I reckon that some enemy of Montana has been talking to you, but it ain't the truth. My partner can play cards, and play 'em for all they are worth, too, but that don't make him a card-sharper; in fact, these fellers in Deadwood who hang round the saloons and git their living a-playing cards hate him like all possessed. You see, they have tried to rope him in for a greeny two or three times and every time he has flaxed them right out of their boots. Oh, they don't love him much!"

"Your partner had some trouble last night, didn't he?"

"Yes, but it was forced on him; some fool bull-whacker, with more muscle than brains, took it into his head that he must get up a fight with Montana."

"How had he offended the man?"

"Why, he hadn't offended him at all; he never saw the feller before, but he would have it, and so my partner jes' slung the galoot over his head and pretty near jarred the life outen him."

"By the by, Mr. Hallowell, I've got a favor to ask of you," Mercedes said, abruptly.

"You don't say so!" the miner was astonished.

"Yes, I want a specimen of your partner's handwriting; a line of poetry I should prefer."

"Oh, yes, I understand; I kin git that for you."

"And you won't let him know that it is for me?"

"Oh, no, of course not!" and Hallowell smiled, significantly. It was all clear to him now. The girl was dead in love with Montana for a fact.

"And when you get it you will bring it to me up to the store?" Mercedes asked, rising to depart.

"Sartin!"

"I shall not forget your kindness," and with a smile Mercedes took the road toward the town.

"I tell yer, she's got it bad!" Hallowell exclaimed, as the girl's graceful figure vanished around the point.

Hardly had she disappeared from sight when Montana came into view, striding down the upper end of the gulch.

"Hallo! where have you been?" Hallowell asked.

"On a raid," Montana answered, carelessly.

"I've jest had a visitor."

"Indeed; who was it?"

"Miss Mercedes."

"Oh!"

And then, just as Montana was about to inquire in regard to Miss Kirkley's visit, around the lower angle of the gulch came a female form.

It was Dianora Campbell!

## CHAPTER XX.

### AN ADVANCE IN FORCE.

JUST one look Montana took at the superb figure of the girl which was proudly arrayed in a walking-suit of dark cloth, profusely trimmed, and cut in the latest fashion; the heavy masses of her rich, yellow-tinted hair, were carefully arranged, braided and coiled in the newest style of the hair-dresser's art, and the magnificent triumph of millinery skill which sat so coquettishly upon her well-shaped head was not to be excelled even in the New York shops, for imported from la belle Paris it had been by Miss Dianora on the occasion of her last visit to foreign shores. Costly diamonds, each one worth the year's toil of a hard-working mechanic, sparkled in her ears and at her collar and the brisk walk under the clear sky and in the gentle breeze, fresh from the mountains, freighted with the balsamic odors of the giant pines, lords of the free hills, had given to the complexion of the girl a freshness and a rosy bloom not often seen on the cheeks of fashion's queen. If she had studied intently to appear to the best advantage possible she could not have arrayed herself better. Just one look Montana took, and then he wheeled abruptly around.

"Confound these women!" he exclaimed. "You can attend to this one, Hallowell; one is enough for me!" and then he strode into the house, evidently out of temper, closing the door behind him.

"That poor cuss has suffered awfully at the hands of some she-critter, I guess!" the big miner decided, rather astonished at the sudden retreat of his partner and amazed at the temper he had displayed.

And then Hallowell turned his attention to the stranger approaching.

The miner had never seen Miss Campbell before, but he had heard of the arrival of the Eastern woman radiant in "store-clothes," and at the first glance he guessed that this gorgeous creature, approaching in such style, was the daughter of the Honorable Mortimer Campbell, the man so anxious to buy the Little Montana mine.

"Mebbe he's sent this heifer up here to try and negotiate for the property, he's so 'tarnal anxious," Hallowell muttered to himself. "I wish to thunder that Montana had stayed to talk to her. I ain't worth a cent where these females are consarned. Jerusalem! ain't she a stunner. Mercedes is a pretty little gal, but this woman is jest a glorious creature!"

Dianora came within a few yards of the miner and then inclined her head as politely as though she was accosting an emperor.

Hallowell acknowledged the salutation considerably flustered.

"Good-day," she said, her voice as rich and musical as her form was fair and graceful.

"Good-day, marm," Hallowell replied, profoundly impressed with the style and beauty of the dashing Miss Campbell.

"Is this the Little Montana mine?" she questioned, smiling pleasantly, disclosing her perfect white teeth, guarded by such lips of cherry ripeness that the soul of an anchorite, sworn to forswear forever the joys of womankind, might be tempted to break his oath just for a single moment to taste the dewy sweetness of those superb lips, and she looking the miner full in the face with her glorious eyes of blue, so full—eyes that seemed formed only to melt with love's tenderness.

Was it a wonder that this superb girl, rich in all the charms of womanhood, should dazzle the eyes of the simple, honest-hearted miner?

Wily men of the world, old in years and experience, statesmen, judges, lawyers, editors, the rulers of the land, had been led, willing captives, by this siren's smiles, and therefore it was not strange that the big-hearted miner, simple and honest in his nature as a child, should be completely taken prisoner by this Eastern queen of fashion.

"Yes, marm, this is the Little Montana," Hallowell replied, twitching his hat awkwardly in his hand, and mentally wishing that he had on his best suit of clothes and a "b'iled shirt" instead of the rough garb he wore.

"And you are one of the owners of the mine?"

"Yes, marm."

"Mr. Jones?"

"No, marm, my name is Hallowell—Elijah Hallowell, from the State of Maine, marm; I'm his partner."

"And that young lady whom I met just now as I came up the valley is your wife, I presume?"

Hallowell blushed clear up to the roots of his hair and away down the back of his brawny neck at the very idea—the idea so sweetly and pleasantly advanced.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed, "that was Miss Mercedes Kirkley. She keeps a store in the village."

"Oh, I am too fast then in my guessing," she replied, laughing; "but, probably, if I were to ask the same question six months or a year later I should not be so far from the mark."

Hallowell laughed, good-naturedly.

"Well, marm, I reckon that six months or a year won't make much difference in regard to that young lady and myself. I guess we won't never be any nearer to each other than we are now."

"Perhaps Mr. Jones is to be the happy man, then?" Dianora suggested, with a most charming smile.

The big miner smiled in return.

"Well, marm, I won't say yes or no as to that, but it ain't me that she comes arter, I know that for sure!"

Miss Campbell laughed outright at the earnestness displayed by Hallowell in denying the soft impeachment, and, exposed as he was to the full influence of the merry laugh, so silvery sweet, the honest miner could not help laughing, too.

"What did you say the name of the lady was?"

"Miss Kirkley."

"Miss Kirkley?"

"Yes, marm."

One used to Dianora Campbell and her ways could have easily told that she was repeating the name so that it would remain fixed in her memory.

"Miss Kirkley," again said Dianora; "a very pretty name and a very odd one, too."

"But it ain't half so odd as her first name."

"Indeed! and that was—Mer—"

"Mercedes."

"Oh, yes; I nearly remembered it."

"That's the oddest of the two to my thinking."

"Yes, I think it is; I quite agree with you there. Mercedes Kirkley. I shall not be apt to forget that name."

And what man so wise—what wit so keen as to detect a hidden menace in the smoothly-spoken speech coming so sweetly from the smiling lips?

"Yes, marm, and she keeps a leetle shop up to Deadwood."

"A shop!" and Miss Campbell lifted her elegant eyebrows in wonder.

"Yes, marm."

"A strange occupation for a young girl, I should think, in this wild country."

"Well, yes, marm; I reckon that it is rather odd," Hallowell added, after a slight pause, during which he had apparently thought the matter over.

"What kind of a shop?"

"Cigars, notions and sich like," the miner explained.

"And I presume that she is pretty well patronized?"



"Yes, marm, she does pretty well, I reckon."

"I suppose that after she marries Mr. Jones, she will give the shop up," Dianora said, in the most innocent manner possible.

"You're too much for me now, marm," Hallowell replied, shaking his head.

"They have not taken you into their confidence then?" and again Miss Campbell laughed merrily as though it was a most excellent joke; and the big miner, fascinated by the witchery of the woman, laughed also, though it would have puzzled him to have told at what he laughed.

"No, marm, I reckon they hain't."

"Where is your partner now? Was he the gentleman I saw enter the house as I came up the valley?"

If Montana's sudden retreat had been intended as a hint for Hallowell to deny his presence, the trick was useless. The lady had evidently recognized him by his appearance, and with his long hair, white, colorless features and odd dress of deerskin, once seen or described, his person was not apt to be forgotten.

"Yes, marm, that was my partner, Mr. Jones—William Jones, or Montana as he is generally called."

"Why do they call him by so strange a title?"

"Well, marm, I kin hardly tell; it's strange how nicknames sometimes get stuck on to a man, and how they cling to him. He's from Montana, and this here mine which he discovered he called the Little Montana."

"Do you know I'd like to make the acquaintance of your partner?" Dianora said, in her most charming manner. "Won't you please be good enough to bring him out and introduce him?"

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE YELLOW-HAIRED SIREN.

Hallowell was somewhat astonished at the unexpected request, but he had seen many a whimsical woman in his time and fully understood that the fair sex were often given to odd notions.

"Certainly, marm," he said.

"I take strange fancies sometimes," she smilingly observed, "and I have a great desire to see the gentleman to whom has been given so odd a name. Now Mr. William Jones is plain and sensible enough, but Montana is quite romantic."

"That's more than he is, marm," Hallowell observed, in his blunt way; "for he's as quiet and sober as a judge."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, fact! So, marm, don't you be disappointed ef he don't talk much. Fact is I do jawing enough for the hull firm."

"I'm afraid that you wrong him and slander yourself!" Miss Campbell exclaimed, with a laugh, and looking the miner straight in the face with her beaming blue eyes.

As blunt and outspoken Hallowell said afterward, in describing the interview, he had never felt so strong an inclination to hug a woman before in all his life.

Miss Dianora Campbell had taken Elijah Hallowell for all he was worth.

"I'll—I'll fetch him out, Miss—marm!" the miner exclaimed, in evident confusion, and then he retreated in hot haste to the shanty planted against the side of the gully.

Dianora watched him with her great eyes, and a little smile of contempt curled her handsome lips.

"What fools these men are!" she muttered, from between her white teeth, which were as regular and perfect in their set as ever Dame Nature placed within the mouth of a mortal. "I can twist this fellow around my finger just as I please—the great, overgrown boy. I have snared him, but the other, ah! who knows?"

And after the utterance of this phrase, borrowed from our sister tongue of Mexico, Miss Campbell sat down upon a small boulder which rested in a bed of white sand.

Her sun-umbrella she carried in her hand, the silken folds closed, and with the sharp point she began idly tracing lines in the smooth surface of the sand. Evidently she was in deep thought.

She had watched the door of the humble shanty close behind the stalwart figure of the miner, and she expected each instant to see it reopen and expose to sight the person of the man she sought.

The seconds lengthened into minutes and yet he came not.

"If he don't come to me, I'll go to him!" she muttered, and just at that moment Dianora did not wear that lovely expression which had so fascinated the tall son of the State of Maine.

And then the lines in the sand took shape and resolved themselves into letters—the letters into words.

And the words a name.

Mercedes Kirkley she wrote in the sand, and then on the end of the name she affixed, as if in mockery, the title, Mrs. Montana!

Smilingly—but with something cruel and heartless in her smile—she contemplated her work.

"Mercedes Kirkley, Mrs. Montana!" she murmured. "Oh, no! not while I live!" she cried, fiercely; and as she spoke she jabbed the point of the umbrella handle along the name, ruthlessly destroying what she had written so fairly in a bold, round hand.

"Oh, no, never while I live!" she repeated. "He may not be for me, but I will never tamely submit to see him the prize of any other woman! And this little doll-faced shop-girl, with her mincing step and her prim dress, to dare to think of rivaling me—I who have reigned as a queen in Washington, and have held

my own against all the belles of the East at the fashionable watering-places! I might have taken my pick out of a dozen—statesmen, railway kings, giants of the stock exchange, successful politicians of every grade, but for his sake and the memory of the old, happy days, long before I knew how bad this world really was, I have kept my faith—or at least kept my hand free. I will be honest with myself and not deny that I have allowed myself to love since then, but not as I loved him, and he has probably utterly forgotten me, but I'll make him remember though, or I am not the girl I think I am!" and Dianora smiled proudly as she gave utterance to her boast.

While the beautiful girl was indulging in these reflections quite a conversation had taken place within the shanty between the two partners.

Hallowell had rushed into the house, almost breathless in his haste.

He found Montana sitting upon an old cracker-box gazing in a particularly gloomy manner up at the ceiling where the stove-pipe projected through the roof.

"By golly!" Hallowell exclaimed, excitedly, "she's a stunner!"

Montana made no reply; in fact, took no notice of the speech at all, still intently engaged in staring at the roof.

The persistent gaze attracted Hallowell's attention, and he looked up at the roof in order to see what it was that Montana surveyed so earnestly.

"What's the matter? What's broke up there! anything?"

"Nothing that I know of," Montana replied, placidly.

"But what are you looking at?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Why in thunder don't you pay attention then to a feller when he's a-talking to you?"

"I did pay attention," Montana said, quietly. "I heard what you said, but as I am not interested in stunners of any description, living, I did not feel called upon to make any reply."

"Well, now, I tell you, old man, she is jest—jest—" and Hallowell paused for want of a word.

"Colossal!" suggested Montana, mildly.

"That's jest it, by golly!" exclaimed the big miner, in a state of high admiration. "Talk about that old heathen Venus; why, this splendiferous critter of a heifer could knock spots out of her!"

"Hallowell, my friend, you've got it bad!" Montana observed.

"Well, I'll own up that the gal has rather taken me into camp," Hallowell admitted, with a grin upon his good-natured features. "That leetle gal, Mercedes, is right nice, as a Southern feller would say, but this gal—why, she jest knocks the socks off of any gal I ever did see!"

"Well, go for her—win her—wed her—be happy—you have my consent—bless you, my children!" Montana ejaculated.

"Oh, git out with your fooling!" Hallowell cried. "Do you s'pose she'd look at a poor galoot like me, and they say her father, old Campbell, is jest rolling in wealth."

"I've seen the moon shine brighter on a puddle than on the ocean—" Montana began, but Hallowell unceremoniously interrupted him.

"Oh, quit!" he cried; "by golly I ain't a-going to be called a puddle by anybody. This Miss Campbell—"

"Oh, then it is Miss Campbell?"

"Of course."

"I thought that I recognized her."

"Oh, you know her then?"

"No."

"Seen her up-town, mebbe?"

"No."

"How in thunder did you know it was Miss Campbell, then?"

"Guessed that it was the lady by her dress," Montana exclaimed. "I heard that the honorable member from Tadpole Hollow had his daughter with him, and that she sported a whole dry-goods store on her person, to say nothing of a jewelry shop, and of course after that description it was as easy as rolling off a log to recognize her when she came up the valley."

"Well, old man, you're in luck! she wants to make your acquaintance."

Montana made a wry face.

"The deuce she does! Does she know that I am here?"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### FACE TO FACE.

"Know that you air here?" repeated Hallowell; "well, yes, I reckon that she does."

Montana fully looked the disgust he felt.

"What in thunder did you want to let her know for?"

"How could I help it when she axed me plump?"

"Why didn't you tell her that I had gone to China?"

"Too thin!" exclaimed the big miner.

"How so?"

"She see'd you go into the house! Oh! she's lightning, she is! Say, partner, she's the finest woman that I ever set eyes on a-walking on top of this here airth!" The giant was enthusiastic.

"Do you think so?" quoth Montana, dryly.

"I believe yer! Why, Montana, she's a reg'lar fust-class angel!"

"Devil, more likely," answered Montana, bitterly.

Hallowell looked astonished.

"What on airth put that idee into your head?" he asked.

"Why, she's as pretty as a picter!"

"Handsome is as handsome does?"

Hallowell was amazed; never before since he had known his partner had he heard him speak so bitterly, and as the brilliant



Miss Campbell had made such a favorable impression upon him he could not understand why Montana was not likewise captivated.

"Oh, you ought to jes' talk to her for awhile, that's all; she's a reg'lar born lady."

"Yes, a regular princess, eh?"

Montana was sarcastic, but Hallowell did not perceive it.

"Oh, yes, jes' as easy and graceful! I tell yer, Montana, Mercedes is pretty fair shakes of a girl but she ain't a circumstance to this one!" and the big miner's honest admiration was expressed in looks as well as words.

"Well, she's taken you for all you are worth, that's plain," Montana observed.

"Oh, get out!"

"It's a fact!"

Hallowell was blushing like a girl under Montana's keen gaze and was decidedly uneasy although he attempted to laugh the matter off.

"Humbug! Can't a man look at a gal without having sich a thing sed of him? But come; she wants to see you."

"What does she want of me?"

"Why, kinder curious to make your acquaintance, I s'pose; leastways, she sed something like that."

"She recognized me, then, when I entered the house?"

"Oh, yes; she axed right out plump if you warn't Mister Montana. If it hadn't a bin for that I might have tried to put the critter off, 'cos I kinder suspicioned that you wasn't anxious to talk with her when you dusted into the shanty so lively; but, I tell yer, Montana, you'd 'a' missed it, for she's a reg'lar screamer. Durn my old boots! if she ain't jes' a leetle ahead of any she-critter that I ever happened to run across. She's jes' as keen as a razor!"

"Old fellow, is she keen enough to cut between us—to sever our friendship?" asked Montana, in his peculiar, odd, abrupt way.

"What an idea!" Hallowell cried, surprised at the thought. "What on airth put that into your noddle?"

Montana merely shook his head as if in doubt; gazed earnestly into the honest face of the tall son of the old State of Maine, but made no reply in words.

"I kinder reckon that you air trying to poke fun at me, ain't you?" Hallowell exclaimed, good-naturedly. "I'll own up that I'm a leetle sweet on this here splendiferous critter; but, thunder! if a man can't slop over once in a while 'bout a woman, what on airth is he fit for?"

Montana merely smiled at this burst of confidence, and that was all.

"Well, you'll come out and see her, won't you?" Hallowell questioned.

"I suppose I shall have to," was Montana's evidently unwilling admission.

"Yes, I s'pose so, too; she knows you're here. Come out and talk to her. I tell you what, partner, the sight of that gal is good for store eyes!"

"Go ahead; it's no use trying to run away from our fate," and Montana put on a stern look.

Hallowell stared at the speech, but forbore to comment upon it, and the two emerged into the air.

Miss Campbell was seated upon a bowlder, busily engaged in tracing curious figures in the sand at her feet with the point of her parasol handle, and was apparently unconscious of the approach of the two miners.

"Gosh-all-firelock!" cried Hallowell, in the ear of Montana, as they came down the slope, "did you ever see a prettier woman than she is since the day you war knee-high to a grasshopper?"

"Did you ever see a rattlesnake winding in the grass of a sunny glade, every scale glistening in the warm light, every movement a curve of beauty?" Montana returned.

Hallowell stared; odd as were his partner's moods he had never known him to talk so strangely before.

And Dianora Campbell was a beauty indeed, as she sat so picturesquely poised upon the bowlder. Few men in this world with souls so calloused by Old Father Time's searing hand as to be able to gaze without admiration upon the ripe charms of Dianora's glorious womanhood.

But, upon Montana's white and marble-like face no trace of appreciation could be discerned; he gazed upon the beautiful girl, so rich in her fresh young beauty, as coolly as though she was but a piece of stolid stone carved to the human form instead of being so rich in wealth of charms.

Attracted by the sound of the footsteps approaching the girl raised her head, a bright, beaming smile upon her beautiful features.

One used to Dianora and her ways would have said that she was doing her best to be fascinating.

"This is my partner, Miss Campbell," said Hallowell, introducing Montana with his best bow.

"Mr. Jones?" questioned Dianora, rising, with a charming smile and acknowledging the introduction.

Montana bowed, coldly and placidly.

"Yes, marm, Mr. Jones; though I guess he's much better known by the name of Montana round these here parts."

"I think that I have had the pleasure of meeting you before, Mr. Jones," Dianora said, in her sweetest tones.

Montana looked surprised and shook his head slowly.

"You do not remember me then?"

"No, Miss."

"And yet I am sure that we have met before," she persisted.

"I reckon not, Miss," Montana rejoined, coldly and calmly, while Hallowell looked on somewhat astonished at the conversation.

And then Dianora turned her bright eyes suddenly on the big miner.

"Mr. Hallowell," she said, "I trust that you will excuse me if I request the favor of a private interview with Mr. Jones?"

The charming smile which accompanied the words was altogether too much for the captivated Hallowell, and he really reddened with delight at being able to oblige the beautiful woman in this trifling way.

"Oh, certainly, marm; I've got a leetle business down the gulch and I kin attend to it now as well as any other time."

Miss Campbell bowed and smiled, and the honest-hearted miner hurried away, overjoyed at being able to render a service worth a "thank you," and yet a little annoyed that she should wish a private interview with Montana rather than with himself.

"Mebbe she thinks that she kin talk my pard out of his idee or holding on to the mine," he muttered to himself, as he walked down the gulch; "and I reckon that she will twist him out of it, if anybody kin, but he's a dreadful feller about getting sot, and when he is sot, he's sot for good."

The tall form of the miner disappeared around the bend in the gulch.

Dianora Campbell looked to the north and then to the south.

No human, bird nor beast, in sight except the man and woman by the gulch claim.

"And now, once again," cried Dianora Campbell, "Mr. William Jones—Montana—or whatever else you may be pleased to call yourself, we are face to face!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### NOT THE MAN.

THE miner gazed upon the beautiful girl, an expression of astonishment written upon his features.

"I beg your pardon," he said, after a moment's pause; "I fear that I do not understand you."

"I will repeat my speech," the girl replied, the smile still upon her lips, but yet she was evidently annoyed by his remark. "I said, 'Once again, Mr. William Jones—Montana—or whatever else you may be pleased to call yourself, we are face to face.'"

Again Montana stared, again he appeared to be totally at a loss to comprehend the meaning of the words.

An expression of impatience escaped from Miss Campbell's red lips, and she tapped her dainty foot petulantly upon the white sand.

"On! you are playing your part very well indeed!" she exclaimed, "but do you think that you can deceive me?"

"I really beg your pardon, Miss," Montana replied, evidently embarrassed by the situation, "but I am afraid that you are laboring under some great mistake. If I understand you rightly, you think that we have met before and that I wish to deny the fact."

"You are denying the fact!" cried Miss Campbell, abruptly, "and you are not as wise as you used to be if you think that you can deceive me in this matter!"

"Miss, I am not denying the fact—I am only denying that it is a fact," Montana returned, coldly.

"Oh!" and Dianora's eyes flashed fire, "you have mistaken your vocation; you should have been a lawyer, you play with words so cleverly."

Montana shrugged his shoulders at the doubtful compliment but did not reply in words; calmly and quietly he gazed into the face of the beautiful girl who was now evidently in a state of high excitement.

"And this is my reward!" Dianora exclaimed. "I come to you prepared to lay at your feet wealth, station, power, everything that the heart of man can covet in this world! What is your ambition? for that you have some darling wish I know, or else you are not the man who won my girlish love long years ago. I have plenty of money and know how to use it. Money, like steam, or any other potent power, is useless to the fool who cannot make it his slave, but suffers it to master him. Would you be a giant in the stock exchange? I know the way to be trodden and the means to use! Would you play with the destinies of a nation as a child plays with a toy? I can show you the road that leads to political power—know every crook and turn of the dark and devious path lined with the graves of ambitious men whose hearts were less stout and wits less keen than they deemed them; I can tell you what to do and how to do it! I know every trick by means of which the votes of the fickle multitude can be won, and once you are fairly in your seat in the hall of State, I will sue, fascinate and toil for you as only a woman can toil for the man she loves! All I ask in return is but the renewal of the old-time tenderness; I have the power to demand it as a right—but I do not—I am humble; I plead to you—I do not command; only a little thing I ask, the love which is mine by right!"

With stolid face—cold and calm as a statue of iron, Montana listened to this passionate outbreak. No sign of softening was there on his pale features, and Dianora, skilled in reading faces and watching his now as eagerly as if she were a prisoner waiting for a sentence which might lead to death, and he the judge whose lips could give or take a life away, guessed that her effort had failed.

"You will at least answer me?" she said, slowly, and after a long pause, during which she had waited in vain for a reply.

"Miss, I didn't know how to answer you!" Montana exclaimed, bluntly.

"You do not know how to answer me!" Dianora cried; even her keen wits at fault now.



"No, Miss; I see that it ain't the least bit of use for me to tell you that I ain't the man you think I am. You have made up your mind that I am somebody, and my denying it don't help the matter at all. If I was inclined to take advantage of the delusion under which you are laboring I might allow you to continue in your mistake and accept the brilliant offer which you have just made me; but, Miss, I ain't that kind of a man. I won't take advantage of your mistake, for I don't care for the kind of life you speak of at all. I'm a quiet, home-body, Miss; I should be like a fish out of water in the society you offer me. All I want is a decent, honest living, and I reckon as long as I hold my mine here I can get that. I ain't got any ambition at all, Miss; it ain't in me."

"You have given me my answer now, even though you deny your identity," Dianora said, quietly.

Montana looked puzzled for a moment; he had expected a stormy outbreak, and the calmness of the girl surprised him.

"Yes, Miss, I suppose that you may consider it a sort of answer."

"You prefer your home here amid these wild scenes and lawless surroundings to all that I can offer in the way of luxury and wealth?"

"Well, I haven't any right to accept such things from you, Miss," Montana answered, bluntly.

"Oh! enough of that!" Dianora cried, with a gesture of impatience; "I know very well that you are the man I take you to be."

"They call me William Jones—"

"And call you wrongly they that do so!" the girl cried, vehemently. "Your name is Robert Peyton, your birthplace, Fredericksburg, on the Rappahannock. You married me in Chicago ten years ago; just six days our honeymoon lasted and then you disappeared, and I have never set eyes on you since, until I saw you in Deadwood last evening."

Montana smiled; it was plain that the persistence of the woman amused him.

"I see, Miss, that it ain't of the least use to argue with you," he said; "you're set in your notion, but I'm not the man."

"For the last time then—you refuse?"

"I'm not the man!" he repeated.

"You prefer a miner's hard, uncertain toil to the station and wealth I offer?"

"Yes, Miss, I do," Montana replied, decidedly. "Every man to his fancy; I had rather live here in peace and quiet than mix again with the big world. I prefer it."

"And you prefer Mercedes Kirkley to me?"

Montana started as if he had trodden on a rattlesnake and heard the warning war-cry of the spotted monster sounding in the air.

A gleam of triumph shone in Dianora's clear blue eyes as she noted the effect of her cleverly-aimed shaft.

"I have pierced you at last, eh?" she exclaimed.

"You have astonished me, that's all," Montana responded, contemptuously.

"Oh, you are very clever!" Miss Campbell exclaimed, full of wrath; "but, clever as you are, you will find that I am a match for you! I am your wife—the law has never stepped between us; you have forgotten me for this little pale-faced slip of a girl—a child who had better be playing with her dolls than thinking of lovers! Are you blind, Peyton, that you prefer Mercedes Kirkley to Dianora Campbell?"

"You are mistaken, Miss; the lady you speak of is nothing to me, nor I to her," Montana said, coldly. "But if the case was different, and we were lovers, I rather think that all the world combined wouldn't separate us!"

"You defy me?" and Dianora rose, pale with anger.

"If that is a defiance, Miss, then I defy you," Montana answered, half turning away.

"Wait and hear me for a moment!" Miss Campbell cried, lurid fires flashing in her great blue eyes. "You have scorned me and my love, and now it is war between us. This girl—I will tear her from your arms; this mine which you think so valuable—I will wrest it from you; firmly fixed as you are here in Deadwood, I will make you curse the hour you first set foot in this region! Your friends shall drop away as the dried and withered leaf falls from the tree when the autumn winds blow! And then, when at last I crush you to the earth, helpless, perhaps you will remember that there is one true heart in the world that has never ceased to beat for you, and will be willing even then—as I shall be—to forgive and forget!" And then Miss Campbell swept proudly away, as fair a girl in her glorious beauty as ever the Western sun shone upon.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### O'TOOLE THE GREAT.

CALMLY Montana watched the lady depart, no trace of emotion upon his marble-like face. Miss Campbell's threats had made no more impression than her supplications.

Around the bend in the gulch walked the girl and disappeared from sight.

And then Montana fell to meditating.

"My friends shall fall from me, eh?" he muttered, seating himself upon the rock from whence Dianora had risen. "The mine shall be wrested from my possession. Mort Campbell, esquire, butcher and statesman, is to perform that little operation, I presume; but, maybe, it won't be so easy a job as they think! So far, since I have sojourned in Deadwood, I have kept my hands off my fellow-men; I have jumped no man's claim—have kept

out of every one's way; I have let every one alone, and have trusted that the compliment might be returned; but if it is to be war, why then, they shall have it, red-hot! Mercedes, too! So they couple our names together, do they? I have been a fool to allow any one to see that I liked the girl. What has such a man as I am to do with a fresh young heart? Mine was seared, long ago. There is a mystery about the girl, too. For the past ten days I have avoided her, and she, instead of being offended, has taken pains to seek me out here. Does she really care for me? or is it but the natural coquetry of woman annoyed at the defection of an admirer, and determined to again lure the truant bird to her feet? Is there such a thing in this life as a true and honest-hearted woman? I've tried two of them and found them both equally false and fickle. I ought to be satisfied, but I suppose it is man's nature to long for a woman's love. Bah! what an idiot I am! I talk like a love-sick boy. Mercedes is nothing to me nor I to her. No more will I linger under the spell, charm she ever so wisely. They may beat me in this coming fight, but at the worst I can turn red-skin and in the wild life of the wilderness forget the wrongs that civilized man has inflicted upon me."

And just at this period the miner's meditations were interrupted by a musical voice, deeply tinged with the rich brogue of old Ireland, chanting a stave loudly down the gulch:

"I'm a gintleman born, an' I scorn a trade,  
I'd be a rich man if me debts was paid."

And then around the bend in the ravine came a stout fellow, clad in the blue of Uncle Sam, and carrying a shot-gun upon his shoulder.

Montana recognized him at once as a soldier of the garrison, by name Dermot O'Toole, and reputed to be about as hard a case as had ever kept step to the music of the march. More days of the year O'Toole spent in the guard-house than at his quarters, and from his blundering, quarrelsome disposition he was a nuisance alike to both the officers and men of his regiment.

Not that O'Toole was naturally a rascal, but he had a quick temper, drank to excess whenever he could procure liquor, and then was never happy until he had got into a fight with somebody. Punishment had little effect upon him, for he never could be convinced that he was at all in the wrong, but always looked upon himself as being a very much abused individual.

Montana was very well acquainted with the soldier, having, with his natural love for fair play, interfered once to save him from being pretty roughly handled by a party of miners from one of the mountain gulches with whom O'Toole had succeeded in quarreling. With the usual disdain for numbers, so common to the Celt in liquor, the soldier had defied the whole party to mortal combat, and was being well pounded when Montana, reluctant to see a man beaten when he was so drunk as to be hardly able to stand, got in between the combatants, and, aided by a few others, succeeded in stopping the row.

O'Toole had been lugged off to the fort by some of the townsmen, and Montana had not happened to encounter him since the day of the affray; in fact, the doughty Irishman had spent the better portion of the time since that occasion in "durance vile," the guard-house having held him prisoner.

"The top of the mornin' to you, sorr," said the Irishman, as he came up the gulch.

"How are you?" Montana responded.

"Foine, sorr, as foine as silk, bedad!"

"Out gunning?"

"Yis, sorr, it's huntin' I am, d'ye mind! Do ye think that I'd be afther findin' a buffalo beyand?" and O'Toole pointed up the gulch.

"Nary buffalo!" was the terse reply.

"Is it a deer, thin, that I'll shoot?"

"You might find a deer up at the head of the gulch."

"Sorra a wan of me cares phat it is, as long as it's somethin' that I kin git a crack at," and the soldier came close to where the miner sat on the boulder, looked around him mysteriously, and his rough and ill-favored face assumed a cunning expression.

"It's a gintleman ye air, Mister Montana!" he said, cautiously, and in a low voice, barely above a whisper.

"Yes, I hope so," Montana added, considerably astonished at the manner of the soldier.

"Your word's as good as yer bond, an' both of them are fust-class!"

"Well, I hope so."

"It's a foine man ye air, sorr; if it hadn't been for you, sorr, it's a dead man I'd be this blessed min'te, d'ye mind!"

"I guess they would have battered you up pretty well."

"Oh, no! it isn't that, sorr!" O'Toole exclaimed, with great dignity. "Divil a batter at all. I would have kilt ivery man of the crowd, an' thin it's a hangin' matter that would have been to the fore!"

"Do you think so?" asked Montana, gravely, rather amused at the view the Irishman took of the affray in which he had been so well pounded.

"You saved me from murderin' the blaggards, an' I'll do as much for you any time, sorr."

"Oh, that's all right," the miner replied, carelessly.

"Mister Montana, it's a foine man ye air, an' a man of judgment; it's the learnin' ye have thick in yer head, sorr; an' now look at me! I'm an O'Toole! It's a mumber of parliament I ought to be this day across the say, if I had me rights, d'ye mind! It's the blue blood of the O'Toole's I have in me veins, an' me grandfather was a dook an' me grandmother a dookess, an' if it hadn't been for my father marryin' a poor girl—she was a Malone—the second darter of Cock-eyed Malone, the boss-dochter, beyand at Ballybrigham, mebbe it's knowin' to him yo air—"

Montana shook his head.

"Well, it's all the same. Yis, sorr; if it hadn't a-been for



that same weddin' it's a dook, sorr, I'd be this day wid lasmin's of gould!" exclaimed the Celt, impressively.

"It was bad for you, old man," observed the miner.

O'Toole felt encouraged by this sympathy. As a general thing his relation of his high descent and ducal rights were received with shouts of laughter.

"Yis, sorr, it was bad! but it is the heart of a dook that I have within me for all that same. It's a gintleman, sorr; sorra bad luck to me whin I forget it! though I do condescind to carry a musket and drill like a nagur. Ye did me a service, sorr, an' Dermot O'Toole is the b'y wid a memory. Ye have inemies, sorr, an' it's flat on the broad of your back they'd like to lay yees! Wan of dem—an' it's a high cockalorum he is in Deadwood!—sed to me, sed he, 'O'Toole, it's a foin boy ye air, but lein' so much in the guard-house is bad for your health; now I can help as no other man can. There is a chap in the town beyand'—this was in the guard-house, d'ye mind!—bitter bad luck to it—'Montana they call him; and it's a poker-player he is; now I'll give you a hundred dollars to play poker wid him. If ye win, all right; if ye lose, all right, too, for thin ye can complain to me that he has ch'ated ye out of your money, an' it's drummed out of the town I'll have him.'"

Montana listened, a little incredulously it must be said, to this tale, for he knew of no reason why any officer of the garrison should wish to injure him.

"I'm very much obliged," he said, perceiving that the Irishman expected an acknowledgment.

"Yer welkim, sorr; shure! me blood wouldn't let me harum the man phat did me a service; more power to your elbow! take care of yerself, allanna!"

And then, with a series of winks and nods, the soldier passed on up the valley; leaving Montana considerably astonished.

"Is it truth, or a drunken fancy?" he questioned.

Enemies seemed to be rising thick around him.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE HOLLOW TREE.

THE slouchy figure of the Irishman had hardly disappeared before Lige Hollowell came round the lower bend of the gulch.

The appearance of the tall form of his partner recalled to Montana's mind the threat of the girl.

"My friends shall fall from me, eh?" he muttered, "and the first one will be Hollowell, I presume. Already this tawny siren has cast her spell upon him. I don't blame the man, though, for she is a glorious woman; few in this world to equal her. How the deuce did she find out anything about Mercedes? Are our names already coupled together in the gossip of the town? I have striven to keep away from her but she seeks me persistently. Is she in love with me? She does not act sometimes as a girl should act toward the man she loves, and if she does not love me why does she seek me? Ah! these women are riddles past the comprehension of the wisest man."

The near approach of Hollowell put an end to the muttered meditations of the miner.

The tall son of the State of Maine was evidently laboring under considerable excitement, for he had hurried up the gulch as fast as his legs could carry him, without really running.

"Say, Montana, something's up!" he cried.

"How so?"

"You know that imp of a greeny—post-office greeny?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's skulking round down in the gulch below in a 'tarnal mysterious manner. I see'd him afore he see'd me, an' he were a-gallop' up an' down a-lookin' at the trees an' muttering to himself jest as if he had gone crazy. Then he happened to ketch sight of me, an' the way he dived into the bush was a caution."

"Well, that was queer."

"Yas, and then I jest slid into the bush, jest out of curiosity, you know, to see what the critter was arter."

"And did you discover?"

"Nary a diskiver," Hollowell replied, laconically.

"No?"

"No, sir, hoss-fly! Jest as the galoot poked his head out of the brush, as if he was watching that nobody was watching him, along come Miss Campbell and he dusted in ag'in. Say!" ejaculated Hollowell, suddenly, "what in thunder did you say to the gal? She looked as mad as a hornet when she went down the gulch."

"Oh, nothing in particular," answered Montana, carelessly.

"If it ain't pushing you too hard—what did she want, anyway?" asked Hollowell, abruptly, all his Eastern curiosity aroused.

"Her father wants to buy the Little Montana mine," Montana answered, quietly.

"I s'pose you said no, of course?"

"That is my answer to everybody; I don't wish to sell the mine."

"But, partner, don't you think that we could make a good thing of it?" Hollowell asked, after a little pause.

"Let well enough alone—that's my motto!"

"Well, you've got more backbone to you than I have; I reckon that if that splendidous critter had axed me to sell I shouldn't have had the grit to refuse."

"It's rather late in the day for any woman to twist me round her finger," Montana observed, with scorn on his lip.

"I reckon though that you wouldn't be quite so stiff about it if it had been Mercedes instead of this one, hey?" Hollowell remarked, slyly.

"What makes you think so?" Montana was not pleased, as was plainly evident from his face.

"Kinder guessed it, that's all," Hollowell replied, with a good-natured snicker. "Oh, it ain't a bit of use for you to try to get out of it. All Deadwood knows that thar ain't ary other man in the town stands ary chance with Mercedes while a chap about your size is around."

This confident declaration did not tend to improve Montana's temper.

"Deadwood might find more profit in attending to its own business," he observed, "than troubling itself about my affairs."

"I reckon that you're the captain of Mercedes' Own," Hollowell added, facetiously, "and it ain't of any use for you to try to deny the fact."

"Well, I sha'n't attempt it then. I don't care what they say about myself, but it can't be pleasant for the girl, particularly when there's no truth in the story."

In answer Hollowell put his tongue in his cheek and winked significantly.

"Too thin?" Montana queried.

"Oh, yes! you can't pull the wool over my eyes in that way, you know. Gosh all hemlock! do you s'pose that any mortal man, that ain't a fool, will believe that that air gal travels all the way up the West Gulch to the Little Montana mine, jest for the fun of the thing? Why, it ain't in the nature of the beast!"

"A willful man will have his own way, so I won't attempt to argue the point with you," rejoined Montana, rising as he spoke. "But, one thing you can be sure of, Miss Kirkley don't wish to buy the mine, and therefore she won't try her fascination upon me."

"Sho!" cried Hollowell, quickly.

Montana understood the caution.

"What's the matter?"

"That leetle greeny cuss—"

"Well?"

"He jest stuck his head round the bend, and then when he caught sight of us he bobbed back ag'in quicker'n a wink!"

"What is the fellow up to?"

"No good, you bet!" replied Hollowell, decidedly. "He's a p'ison leetle cuss! He tried to stick a bad half-dollar on me at the post-office, and he wasn't a-going to take it back nuther, but I jest told him, I'd take it out of his hide if it upstot the whole durned United States government!"

"And he refunded?"

"You bet, and the old deacon, too, tried to lie me out of it, and sw'ar that it was a good piece. My opinion of the deacon is that his religion may be good enough for Sunday, but it ain't worth a durn on week days."

"The boy is evidently up to something," added Montana, in his quiet way; "he is watching us now, hid in the pines at the turn. He's down flat on the ground, but I can see his head stuck through the branches." The miner had an eye like a hawk.

"Say, let's dust into the shanty and watch him through the door. He ain't prowling around here for nothing now, you can bet all your stamps on that!"

"I hardly think that it is worth while."

"He's up to something now, I tell yer!" Hollowell persisted; "come on!"

"All right."

Carelessly the two strolled off in the direction of the shanty, opened the door and entered, closing the door after them.

For full five minutes long-legged Tim remained motionless in his ambush under the spreading branches of the pines, and then, satisfied at last that the two owners of the Little Montana claim were not likely to come out for some little time, he wriggled himself out from his covert in the pine needles and rose to his feet. Then he advanced to the trail which ran up through the gulch and proceeded to examine the trees on the right hand side of the path.

"By goll!" he muttered, "I don't see any holler oak tree! He sed a holler oak tree on the right hand side of the gulch atween the town and the Little Montana mine. Thar's the Little Montana—I'm close onto it, an' I don't see any holler tree at all! Mebbe it's cut down, but I don't see any fresh stumps 'bout hyer—plenty of old ones!"

The overgrown boy advanced within a hundred yards of the boulder whereon Montana had sat, and then he suddenly spied a scrubby oak tree with a small cavity in the trunk on his right hand.

He paused—looked doubtfully at the tree.

"That's an oak—but it tain't a holler tree; it's got a hole in it; mebbe it's the one, arter all! Anyway, I cain't hunt all day for it. If it ain't the right one, I kin tell the man when I see him."

Then Tim glanced carefully around him, saw that the gulch was deserted, sidled cautiously up to the tree, shoved something into the cavity, and, after another glance around to be sure that he had not been observed, took to his heels and disappeared around the bend in the gulch.

The moment the figure of the boy vanished from sight the door of the shanty opened and the partners came forth.

"Didn't I tell you the leetle cuss was up to something?" Hollowell exclaimed. "Did you see what he did?"

"No; I couldn't exactly make out."

"Why, he stuck something in the hole in that tree."

"And I saw him close to the tree."

"And I see'd him stick something into it, but I'll have it out!" Straight then to the tree Hollowell strode, and shoved his big paw into the cavity, while Montana followed closely behind.



## CHAPTER XXVI

## THE LETTER.

FROM the hole in the tree-trunk Hallowell drew a letter, and he looked with considerable astonishment upon the prize he had secured.

It was a plain yellow envelope, directed in a round, easily-deciphered hand, to

"JABEZ Z. SMITH,  
Deadwood City."

A one-cent stamp was affixed to the envelope in one corner, thus plainly showing that it had been posted in Deadwood.

The stamp had not been canceled.

Hallowell turned the letter over and over; it was securely sealed, and of course the inquisitive man-from-Maine's curiosity was completely baffled.

Montana had remained quietly by, apparently taking but little interest in the matter.

"Well, now, what do you think of this?" Hallowell exclaimed.

"You're too much for me, partner, I give it up."

"Jabez Smith—Jabez Z. Smith! I don't know any Jabez Smith in Deadwood, though Smiths are so plenty in the town of a night that if a feller were to sling a cane in any direction from the door of the Big Horn saloon, 'bout eight o'clock, he'd be apt to hit three Smiths, at least."

"Yes, but there may be a Jabez Smith in town, even if you have never heard of him," Montana suggested.

"Oh, this is a trick of some kind!" Hallowell exclaimed. "Who ever heard of a man with a Z in the middle of his name?"

"Zebulon—Zachariah!"

"Oh, it's some sort of a gum-game now, and I'm jest going to open the letter!"

"You had better be careful; they'll have you up for tampering with the mail."

"Git out! I guess a hole in a tree ain't a United States post-office, is it?" the big miner retorted.

"No, not exactly, but, if I were you, I'd put the letter back and let it alone."

"You would?" asked Hallowell, doubtfully.

"Yes; it isn't for you, anyway, and Mr. J. Z. Smith might be indignant if he found out that you had been opening his letters."

"Well, who in thunder is J. Z. Smith, anyway? and what right has he got to take one of our oak-trees for his post-office box?"

"You're too much for me again."

"I tell you, Montana, there's something wrong about this here hull b'iling!" Hallowell protested, earnestly. "In the first place, why did that post-office greeny come sneaking round here, like a cat in a strange garret? If this is all fair and above board why don't this here Smith go to the post-office for his letters, instead of having 'em stuck in a tree?"

"Perhaps Mr. Smith is a lady carrying on a love affair with Tim, and wants to keep the matter quiet," Montana suggested. "It would be just like a girl, you know; romantic to have a post-office in a tree-trunk."

"Oh, humbug! What gal in creation would look at sich an ugly leetle cuss as that Tim? It ain't that, Montana; I tell you there's something crooked about this here hull business. Darned if I don't open the letter!"

"I wouldn't!" Montana exclaimed, warningly.

"Too late! I've bu'sted the consarn!" the big miner replied, holding up the fractured envelope. "I tell yer! thar's no squar' thing about this now, anyway you kin fix it! Thar's some gum-game 'bout it, and I'm going to git to the bottom of the hull matter. This here letter ought to be in the post-office by rights; you see the stamp ain't defaced; that leetle cuss has stole it out and thar's something wrong 'bout it!"

"Well, it's your funeral, old man; go ahead if you want to," Montana replied, in his careless way.

The envelope contained only a single sheet of note-paper, which Hallowell, unfolding, perused.

It was written in the same hand as the direction upon the envelope, a peculiar handwriting, once seen not easily to be forgotten.

The letter began abruptly without the usual prefixes, and read as follows:

"No danger, I think; the road agent business is a mystery at first sight, apparently, but capable of being explained satisfactorily, I think. I heard the Irishman's story; also the account of Lieutenant Perkins, who was in command of the troops that pursued the fellow until he got away in the darkness. What the fellow was after is a puzzle, but I don't believe he was after us. In regard to the two letters being taken, it's ten to one that Paddy lost them himself; and of course he would swear he didn't until he was black in the face. We are all right, only we must be careful in our operations, and the moment the thing begins to get out, why, we must drop it like a red-hot potato. As for the road-agent, he'll come to grief pretty soon, sure, if he keeps on. Keep your eyes open, though, and notify me at once if anything happens."

And there the letter abruptly ended. Hallowell read it over to himself first, and then aloud to Montana.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Hallowell, in utter amazement.

"What's the matter?"

"Didn't I tell you that there was something crooked 'bout this letter?"

"Yes; but what does it all mean?"

"Well, now you have got me, for sure!" and the big miner gave a dubious shake of the head. "Darn me! if I can make head nor tail of it 'cept that this feller he's a-writing to are afeard that this here road-agent—he's the feller that tackled the stage in Bloody Gulch the other night, you remember?"

Montana nodded.

"Well, they are afeard that the road-agent was arter them someway or somehow, 'tain't exactly clear to me."

"Nor to me, either; but now, Lige, you'll have to answer to

Mr. J. Z. Smith for opening his letter. I told you that you had better let it alone. Jabez may go for you."

"Oh, he can go to thunder!" growled Hallowell, defiantly. "I guess I ain't hurt his old letter much; but, I swow! I kinder got the idee into my head someway that it was some gum-game ag'in' us."

"What are you going to do with the letter?"

"Put it back ag'in in the tree."

"You can write on it, 'Opened by mistake, E. Hallowell, Little Montana mine,' Montana suggested.

"Oh, yes, and have Mister Jabez Smith lie in wait for me with a revolver some dark night, for fear that I would find out something about him. No, sir; it ain't my soup! But, I wonder who in thunder Jabez Smith is, and why he selected an oak on our claim for his post-office?"

Montana shook his head; it was evident that he was unable to solve the riddle.

Hallowell put the letter back in the envelope, smoothed it out as well as he could and replaced it in the tree.

"There," he said, the operation finished, "there, Mister J. Z. W. X. Y. Z. Smith—there's your letter, and if you want to know who opened it all I've got to say is that these durned United States mails are allers doing something they hadn't oughter!"

Montana smiled and the two partners walked slowly away from the tree toward their shanty, which, when they reached, they entered.

"By the way!" exclaimed the big miner, suddenly, after he and his companion had got comfortably seated; "I want you to do something for me, Montana."

"Yes, what is it?"

"I want you to gin me your signature and a line of poetry to it, so that, one of these days arter I've made my 'tarnal fortune, and go East to make my old neighbors swell and bu'st with wonder and envy, I kin look at it and remember the old days way out in the Western wilderness where the b'ar grows and the eagle screams!"

"All right; any particular line of poetry which you prefer?" Montana asked.

Hallowell produced his memorandum-book and Montana took his pen in hand.

"Well, let me see, 'Root hog or die,' no, that's a leetle too strong. 'Meet me on the four square,' no, that's good for California, but too highly flavored, anyway. 'United we stand, divided we fall'—how's that?"

"Oh, anything you please, but if you want it as a sort of remembrance suppose I write, 'Should old acquaintance be forgot!'"

"Splendid! that's the ticket for soup!" cried the big miner, enthusiastically. "That will do furst-rate. 'Should old acquaintance be forgot! That's bully!"

"All right."

And then, in peculiar, odd, back-hand writing, Montana transcribed the sentence upon the blank page of the memorandum book and underneath it signed his name.

"'William Jones,' and that is your real name, eh?" said Hallowell.

"Of course," replied Montana, with a smile.

## CHAPTER XXVII

## A NOVEL DEVICE.

ONCE again the shade of night had descended upon Deadwood's lively town.

Once again the clink of glasses and the loud hum of conversation resounded on the still air of the night from every drinking-saloon within the boundaries of the Black Hills metropolis.

The toils of the day over, from every gulch within easy walking distance, the hard-handed miners had flocked into the "city;" some to purchase provisions, others intent only upon a spree and a good time generally, and the majority to hear the news and speculate upon the good or evil fortune that had attended their acquaintances.

Mining is but a game with fortune, and in nine cases out of ten the fickle jade is the winner.

About eight o'clock in the evening the two proprietors of the Little Montana mine arrived in town.

Supplies had run short and the two had come up to town to replenish.

The twain halted in front of Deacon Black's store.

"I reckon I'll go on up to the Big Horn saloon," Hallowell said, "and hear what's going on. When you git through here, come on up."

"All right."

So Montana entered the store, while Hallowell continued on up the street.

Leaving Mr. William Jones, as he persisted in calling himself, to make his purchases, we will follow in the footsteps of Hallowell.

"Big Lige," as he was generally called, was about as well-known as any inhabitant of the district, and as he was frequently accosted on the way he was at least ten minutes in going from Black's store to the Big Horn shanty; he finally arrived there, accompanied by four or five acquaintances who had joined him on the way.

As they approached the saloon, from it came the sound of a loud, hoarse voice, interrupted now and then by bursts of laughter.

"Hallo! what's up?" Hallowell exclaimed, rather astonished by the unusual noise.



"Some pilgrim on a tare, I reckon," one of the party remarked.

But, with the entrance of Hallowell and his friends into the saloon, a dead silence fell upon the throng within. So sudden was the change that the entering party knew at once that their presence had occasioned it.

Standing with his back to the bar, but leaning against it and resting his big elbows on the counter, was the brawny bullwhacker who had so proudly proclaimed that he was own cousin to the engineer of the Per-a-rie Belle, Jim Bludsoe, famed in verse as the doughty hero, who "wa'n't no saint," but when the "biler bu'st as she cl'ared the bar and burnt a hole in the night," resolutely declared "he'd hold her nozzle ag'in the bank till the last galoot's ashore!"

A grinning crowd surrounded the "old he ram of the Big Horn range," as the bullwhacker was fond of terming himself, and from their faces it was plain that the big stranger had been affording them considerable amusement.

Hallowell recognized Bludsoe at once as the party who had insisted upon dragging Montana into a quarrel, and who had been so cleverly worsted by that skillful gentleman, and he understood, from the sudden silence that had fallen upon the group, that the loud conversation, which his entrance had evidently interrupted, had reference either to Montana or himself.

"Wa-al, may I be kicked to death by my own lead mule!" Mr. Bludsoe exclaimed, "ef thar ain't one of the Little Montana chaps now! How air ye, stranger? Will you h'ist some pizen? Name your hog-juice."

"I'm very much obliged to you, but I'm just going to drink with some of my friends here," Big Lige replied, coldly. He did not admire the manner of the other.

"Oh, ax the hull party up; I reckon I kin stand it. I'm rich, I am! I reckon that I own more paying mines than any other two-legged critter west of the Missouri! I jest drive mules fur fun, I do! I ain't obligated to get my hash that way! An' my face is good, too. Nary a whisky-juggler from hyer to Cheyenne but knows the Pet of the Niobrara! that's me, boys. Say, Dick!" and the mule-driver addressed the barkeeper, behind the counter, who was enjoying the fun. "My face is good hyer for fifty dollars, ain't it?"

"Yes, if you put the money up first," the urbane Richard replied, with a wink at the crowd.

"I tole yer so; set 'em up, Dicky, my boy; water fur the crowd! and rub my tumbler ag'in the whisky-bottle!"

The crowd snickered at this bold invitation and the bullwhacker again addressed his remarks to Hallowell.

"Say, you Little Montana chap; whar's that pard of your'n? I want to see him. I reckon that I was a leetle p'isoned when he socked me into the solid airth t'other night."

"I'll bet you five dollars he can do it again!" exclaimed Hallowell, promptly.

"Pilgrim! I would scorn to rob you of your money!" cried Mr. Bludsoe, with great dignity.

The crowd roared incredulously at this assertion.

"No, sir-ee! I never pick a man up on a sure thing; 'tain't in me to salivate a pilgrim in that way!"

"What have you got against my partner that you are so mighty anxious to quarrel with him?" Hallowell demanded, rather sharply.

"Nothing in the world, stranger, 'cept that when I see a chap a-kinder holdin' up his nose like as if he thought that he was better than any one else, I like to take him down a peg or two; kinder cut his comb, like!"

"I reckon that the man don't stand in your boots that will cut Montana's comb!" Big Lige exclaimed, warmly.

"Now, you're bettin' on what he did t'other night! Why, I was jes' a-playin' with him then! I'm chock full of fun, I am! More fun in me than any bob-tailed clam you ever see'd, but I don't 'low any two-legged critter on top of this hyer airth to trip up my heels and plow my head an' shoulders into the solid airth fur nothin', an' Mister Montana has jes' got to step up to the captain's office and settle the furst time I set my two eyes on him!" cried Bludsoe, defiantly.

"Montana's down to the post-office now," said one of Hallowell's friends, itching with a desire for fun.

"He's the mutton I love!" shouted the bullwhacker. "Come along, boys, ef you want to see fun. I'm on the war-path, I am! ba-a-a!"

And out from the saloon the giant hurried, the rest following after, to the great disgust of the barkeeper, loath to lose customers.

Down the street to the post-office the gang proceeded, and marched into the store, to the great astonishment of the deacon, who was not used to such irruptions.

Montana was at the further end of the place, leaning against the counter, examining a bowlful of eggs of whose worth for culinary purposes he had some doubts.

Naturally he looked up as the little crowd came tramping into the store like a drove of wild horses, and at the first glance both recognized the bullwhacker, and suspected his errand.

"Cock-a-doodle-do!" cried Mr. Bludsoe, patting his hands against his sides, and imitating the crowing of a rooster, "I'm the game-cock of Santa Fe! Baa-a-a! that's me, the old he-ram of the Big Horn mountain range!"

"Deacon, these eggs are about all spoiled, I reckon," Montana remarked, never paying the slightest attention to the antics of the bullwhacker, who was cavorting almost in the center of the store, while the grinning crowd filled the fore part of the place by the door.

The deacon was too much occupied in staring at the drunken madman, as he naturally supposed the pugnacious Mr. Bludsoe to be, to pay any attention to the peaceful demands of commerce.

"Oh, look at me!" Bludsoe howled. "I'm the Pet of the Niobrara—the boss bullwhacker of Shian! When I take the war-path, men squeal an' run. I'm yer meat, you long-haired, white-faced Injun, you—"

And just then Mr. Bludsoe paused, suddenly interrupted in his speech. Montana had seized an egg from the bowl and shied it at him. Full in the mouth the bully got it, and the ancient shell exploding from the confined gases, filled the mouth of the bullwhacker with a most unsavory compound.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE MAN BEHIND.

A SECOND egg followed the first, and this took the braggart right between the eyes, filling both of his organs of sight with the disagreeable mess.

A third egg succeeded the second, taking effect on Bludsoe's temple, and a fourth missile missing the head of the bullwhacker, struck against the door and spattered its not very sweet smelling contents over the crowd.

The miners, roaring with laughter at the novel assault, beat a quick retreat into the street when they found that they were likely to receive some of the Chinese-like fire.

The stinkpots of the Mongolian, so renowned in history, were fully equaled by the deacon's eggs.

Spluttering, cursing, and almost suffocated by the nasty sticky stuff, the half-blinded giant managed to find his way out into the street.

Some of the crowd had been so completely overcome by the peculiar and unexpected defeat of the bully, that after gaining the open air they had sat down the better to laugh.

Naturally the racket had attracted the attention of all the passers-by, and soon quite a crowd gathered around the door of the post-office, curious to learn the reason of the disturbance.

One and all, though, kept at a safe distance from the giant, for the perfume which now surrounded him was like anything but airs from "Araby the blessed!"

"Skin me fur a lariat!" spluttered the bullwhacker, "ef I ever fit with such a man before. Talk of a skunk! I'd rather fite a dozen!"

And then the crowd roared again.

"What sort of a cussed town do you call this hyer, anyway, whar a man fites with rotten eggs?" and then the vanquished hero spit out another bit of the egg-shell, and wiped some more of the nasty compound from his noble brow. "I ain't afeared of any six men from hyer to Shian, but cuss me ef I'm open to fite a pole-cat!"

"Oh, you were fairly whipped, old man!" cried one of the bystanders.

"I ain't, nuther!" protested the Pet of the Niobrara, indignantly. "I'm good for fourteen men like this hyer galoot!"

"Not if he throws eggs," suggested one of the lookers-on, gravely, and then again the crowd roared with laughter.

"Oh, you kin all hee-haw!" cried the boss bullwhacker, disgusted at the unseemly mirth, "but I'll straighten this hyer thing out afore Montana gets out of this town to-night—jes' as soon as I wash this durned stuff off! Dog-gone my cat's tail! ef I don't smell wuss nor a pole-cat!"

And then the bullwhacker started up the street on a run, intent upon soap and water.

After the giant's departure the crowd talked the matter over for a while, and one and all pronounced it the richest joke of the season.

Montana's appearance from the store changed the current of the conversation.

"Better look out for yourself, old man!" was a miner's warning.

Montana's keen eyes had been on the alert and he had noticed the disappearance of the bully.

"What's the matter?"

"That cuss sw'ars he's goin' to have it out with you!" said Hallowell.

"Oh, well, I'm ready to throw eggs with him any time," Montana replied, and again the crowd snickered.

"But where is he?"

"Gone to get some cologne," was the answer, followed by an uproarious burst of laughter.

No better joke than this novel discomfiture of a braggart had Deadwood ever enjoyed.

"Oh, he's chockful of fight! he'll jes' massacre yer when he comes back!" one of the miners declared, and then he haw-hawed right out.

The "boys" had got the idea into their heads that the old he-ram of the Big Horn mountain range was a fraud, to use the vernacular.

"Well, then, Hallowell, we had better get out," Montana suggested, in his quiet way, much to the amazement of the bystanders, who didn't relish this prospective back-out on the part of the miner.

"The fellow is coming back," Big Lige said, in remonstrance. "Thunder! you ought to stay and fight it out!"

"Well, I don't think that I shall stay here to wait his pleasure," Montana retorted, decidedly. "I'm not going to be forced into a quarrel by every bully who chooses. If I am assaulted I will defend myself, but I'll neither seek a quarrel nor wait for one." And then Montana strode away, his arms full of small packages—the groceries which he had purchased.

"Your partner's a durned queer fellow!" said one of the crowd to Hallowell, a little annoyed to be thus cheated out of some fun by the withdrawal of Montana from the scene of action.



"Yas, he's an odd genius; you can't drive him much," Lige replied; and then, bidding his friends adieu for a short time, he followed Montana.

The hero of the egg exploit had not taken the road toward the West Gulch, but had gone up the street to the Big Horn saloon where Hallowell found him.

Montana was just intrusting the groceries to the care of the barkeeper when Hallowell entered.

Short as was the time since the affray had occurred the urbane Dick had heard all about it, and was chuckling over the fun.

"But, he's a bad man," he said, confidently, to Montana, "and you'll jest have to keep your eyes open. He's heeled (*armed*) too; got a couple of revolvers and an eight-inch bowie. I see'd him try the caps on 'em to-night." And then the kind-hearted Dick leaned over the counter and whispered in the ear of Montana: "How air ye fixed? air ye heeled all right? 'cos if you ain't, I've got as pretty a pair of pop-guns hyer as thar is in the territory. English make, hair triggers, and carry a powerful big ball; they ain't very large nuther; jest the right kind of tools for a gentl'man to handle. I'll lend them to you if you like. You ought to put a hole through that big fraud and let out some of the gas!"

"Oh, I guess I won't need them, thanking you all the same," Montana replied, composedly.

"Yes, you will!" Dick insisted. "I know that it ain't any of my business, but that feller has got it in for you; he'll jump you, first thing you know! It would be jes' tempting Providence fur to let that cuss go for you and you without nary we'pon."

"What makes you think that he means to jump me?" asked Montana.

"Why, I heered him say as much to-night; he's got a bet of ten or twenty dollars—I didn't hear exactly which—that he'll whip you afore he gets out of this town."

"Well, I don't understand that," Montana observed, a peculiar expression upon his face.

"Neither do I, but it's a sure-enough fact!"

"I'm much obliged to you for your warning."

"Oh, that's all right," Dick replied, magnanimously. "I ain't a-goin' to see one of the boys of the town corraled by any bullwhacker from Shian if I know myself. But, you had better take these little beauties," and Dick produced the nickel-plated revolvers from their hiding-place underneath the bar and pressed them upon the miner.

"Oh, no, thank you; I guess I can take care of this fellow without using weapons. Look out for the bundles. I want to go 'round town awhile and I was afraid that the deacon's place would be closed up before I got ready to go home."

"All right, but jes' you keep your eyes open; that feller is a bad man!" And then the good-natured host of the Big Horn turned his attention to some customers who were rapping for liquid refreshments at the lower end of the counter.

"I reckon that I will have to fight this fellow," Montana observed, "no matter how much I may try to keep out of it. It puzzles me why the man should pick me out to quarrel with, but I hadn't any idea there was any one back of him."

"Who do you think is putting him up to it?" Hallowell asked, totally unable to guess the mystery.

"To find that out would take some guessing," was Montana's rather evasive answer, for he really fancied that he knew well enough who it was that egged the rough giant on to attack him. Mortimer Campbell, ex-hog-butcher and present Member of Congress, wanted the control of the Little Montana mine, and to gain his ends Mort Campbell never hesitated in regard to the means.

"Going to the club-room?" asked Hallowell.

Montana nodded.

And then up on the night rose the hoarse yell of the boss bullwhacker of Shian.

Trouble was at hand!

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE CONTEST.

"COCK-A-DOODLE-DO! hyer I am, the Boss Bullwhacker of Shian—the Pet of the Niobrara—the 'tarnal-cavorting, big-horned sheep of the Rocky Mountains! I kin grin a b'ar to death, I kin! I live on rattlesnakes an' drink alcohol straight!" yelled the bully, outside the saloon, but evidently right at the door. "Whar's the man that w'ars the deerskin togs? I kin eat him, I kin, cl'ar from his head to his feet, barrin' the toe-nails!"

The hoarse chorus of ha, ha's that arose on the air after this startling defiance testified that the antics of the mule-driver had attracted a crowd.

"You're in for it now, old man," Hallowell observed. "It's either fight or back down!"

A peculiar light shone in Montana's dark eyes—a light that Big Lige had never before seen there.

"If the fool will have it, the consequences be on his own head!" Montana said, quietly, but there was a menace in his voice that boded no good to the bullwhacker.

"Come out, you man that fites with sp'iled hen-fruit—come out hyer an' let me bite your ear off!" yelled Mr. Bludsoe, at the top of his voice. "I'm the galoot that runs this hyer town. Come out, you long-haired, slab-sided son of a mule, durn ye!"

And then, as if unable to resist this pressing invitation, Montana stepped through the door of the shanty into the open air, Hallowell following closely behind.

The crowd who surrounded the capering giant in a half-circle, laughing at his antics, immediately scattered.

The bullwhacker was flourishing a big six shooter, and the men of Deadwood nothing doubted, upon seeing Montana advance from the recesses of the Big Horn shanty, that a "shooting

natch" was at hand, and long experience had told these worthy Western gentlemen that in a street affray, in nine cases out of ten, the bystanders always stand a much better chance of getting hit than the real actors in the affair.

But Montana came out quietly, his hands in his pockets, just as if he was about to proceed to his home, rather than answer a challenge to blood and slaughter.

The bullwhacker incontinently followed the example of the crowd and dodged behind an awning-post that an enterprising tradesman had erected in front of his shanty, which was situated just across the street from the saloon.

The idea of the giant attempting to shelter himself behind a post about four inches square was ridiculous, but he acted on the principle that a little shelter was better than none.

"Draw your we'pon—I'm heeled!" cried the bullwhacker, taking deliberate aim at Montana.

The miner never flinched. Straight as an arrow he stood, his hands still in his pockets, and looked with a contemptuous smile upon his face right in the muzzle of the leveled revolver.

"Fire away! you can't hit the side of a house, you overgrown coward!" he exclaimed.

"Hold on!" cried Hallowell, jumping forward, a cocked revolver in his hand, and covering the bullwhacker with the weapon. "This here is murder! My partner ain't heeled!"

"Which I know to be a sure enough fact, gents!" yelled Big Horn Dick, at the top of his lungs, the pretty pair of nickel-plated six-shooters in his hands and both of them leveled at the Man-from-Cheyenne. "I offered to heel him for this fuss, an' he wouldn't have it, an' if that big cuss shoots it ain't the clean white thing!"

A murmur went up from the crowd.

Nowhere on this broad earth can a man find a stronger love for fair play and no favor than dwells in the breasts of the rugged Black Hills miners.

"No, no, gi'n Montana a we'pon!" exclaimed one of the bystanders.

"Yes, give him a fair show!" cried another.

"A fair shake an' no mistake!" said a third.

"Give him a popper!" sung out a friendly soul, safely ensconced behind the corner of the Big Horn shanty.

In a twinkling a dozen weapons, at the least, of all sizes and of all ages and makes, were proffered to the miner.

But with a shake of the head he refused them all.

"No, gentlemen," said he. "I reckon that I don't seek any man's life, and though I hold it no sin to strike in defense of my own, when I am assailed, yet in this case I do not see why I should be bullied into a fight with this stranger, simply because he has taken it into his head to quarrel with me. I have lived in Deadwood now for some time, and no man in the town can say that I was ever concerned in a quarrel. Why this man—a stranger here—should want to have trouble with me, who never injured him in the least, is a mystery. I don't want to wound or kill him, and I don't mean that he shall kill or disable me. I reckon that, though we are in the Black Hills and outside the lines of civilization, you won't stand tamely by and see a man murdered in cold blood or else forced into a quarrel and made to risk his life to gratify the whim of a bragging bully!"

A little hum of approval came from the crowd at this appeal.

Pretty decent sort of men, these toilers after gold and silver in the wilderness, notwithstanding the absence of the softening influences of civilized life.

"That's gospel truth!" cried old General Bowle, who had just arrived at the scene of action. "Fellow-citizens! there is no law in the world by means of which you can compel a man to fight if he doesn't want to! Whar is our boasted liberty, guaranteed to us by our own great American eagle, when he plucked, baldheaded, the roaring lion of white-clifted Albion, if sich things kin be and overcomes us like a summer cloud without our especial wonder?"

"Say, feller-citizens!" yelled the bullwhacker, in disgust, stepping out from behind the awning-post, "ain't I to have no show fur my money at all? This hyer deerskin cuss 'saulted me with eggs—eggs that were laid by an unhealthy hen! He jes' plastered 'em all over me like as if I were a 'tarnal big omelet, or was gwine to be fried with ham; then he wiped me all round in the mud t'other night, an' stood me on my head like a durned circus elephant!"

"Throw down your we'pons an' hev it out in a fair fight!" suggested one of the crowd, anxious for fun.

"That suits me!" cried Montana, stripping off his deerskin coat in a trice.

The giant laid aside his weapons reluctantly. He had tested Montana's prowess once and was rather loath to measure strength and skill with him again.

The bullwhacker rolled up the sleeves of his dirty red shirt with a great deal of display, and then he spat on his hands and skipped round a bit, as graceful as an elephant, evidently hoping to impress Montana with a proper degree of dread before the conflict.

"Time!" yelled a bystander, impatient for the fun.

The crowd, now that the "shooting-irons" had been retired from the field of action, had come from their places of refuge and formed a ring around the two antagonists.

The round full moon overhead, shining with all the brilliancy peculiar to the Black Hills region, gave ample light for every one to view the scene.

The contrast between the two, now that they were stripped for the contest, was not so great as one would have imagined. The bullwhacker was the taller and much the stouter man, but his brawny arms, although much bigger than Montana's, did not begin to show such development of muscle.

The stranger had experienced Montana's wrestling skill once, and therefore did not intend to come in close contact with him



again if he could help it. He trusted to his weight, put into a tremendous blow, to crush his agile antagonist down at a single stroke.

But Montana knew a trick worth two of that, and as the giant skipped around him, flourishing his huge arms like the fans of a windmill, the miner watched his chance, saw an opportunity, pretended to make a blow with his right hand at the bullwhacker's head, which action brought both of the stranger's clumsy fists up to guard his precious face, and then sent out his left in a tremendous stroke, catching the giant full in his fat stomach, just above the belt, knocking the wind out of him and sending him over backward with considerable force.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### THE BULLWHACKER IS SATISFIED.

"UGH!" involuntarily cried Mr. Bludsoe, as the blow landed, and as he sprawled over on his back he bumped his head in anything but an agreeable manner.

It was about as ridiculous a downfall as any man in the crowd had ever seen and one and all burst into a shout of laughter.

"First knock down fur Montana!" cried a facetious chap. "Mr. Bullwhacker goes to grass to reflect upon the Black Hills' earthquakes!"

"Time!" exclaimed the old general, impatient for the fun to go on.

"Jest you hold yer hosses!" spluttered Bludsoe, slowly rising to his feet and puffing like a porpoise, endeavoring to recover his lost wind. "See hyer! 'tain't fair to hit a feller whar he puts his grub!" The bullwhacker looked and felt indignant.

"All's fair above the belt!" Montana replied.

"Correct!" cried the general, and the crowd coincided.

"If yer gwine to hit me thar ag'in, durned ef I want to fight!" Mr. Bludsoe protested. "I ain't no dash-board to stand them mule kicks!"

"You must guard against them, then; that's your look-out," Montana rejoined.

"'Tain't fair, nohow," growled the giant.

"Oh, back out if you've got enough!" one of the crowd suggested.

"Whipped on the fu'st round! Take him home to his mewels!" yelled another, and then a burst of laughter came from the throng.

The bullwhacker was decidedly comic.

And then again the two faced each other.

For a desperate battle between two big men this was about as great a farce as had ever been witnessed in the streets of Deadwood.

Bludsoe profited by his experience this time. He kept at a safe distance from Montana, and if that gentleman made a motion as if he was about to strike back, Mr. Bludsoe would jump and then grin, as much as to say, "You didn't do it that time!"

The crowd soon began to tire of this exhibition, laughable as it was, and presently one of the throng began to yell for eggs, in order to infuse a little courage into the bullwhacker.

Irritated by the sarcastic comments of the bystanders, and beginning to feel a little tired by his exertion—his surplus flesh was telling on him now—Bludsoe resolved to try the effect of a desperate rush, hoping by his weight to force Montana down.

He gathered himself together, working his big arms up and down like the piston of a steam-engine, and then, concentrating all his energies, he made a ferocious attack upon the miner.

Warned by the gleam in the eyes of his opponent, as well as by the expression upon his face, Montana was fully prepared for the onset.

Lightly and nimbly as a dancing-master—and as graceful, too, as any Parisian professor of the toe and heel art—Montana evaded the mad rush by ducking under the right arm of the giant and then, as the other endeavored in his clumsy way to turn and catch his nimble antagonist, Montana gave him a powerful poke under the arm on the ribs, and again the bullwhacker was forced over and tumbled to the ground. Falling "all in a heap" he managed to bring his nose in violent contact with the earth, thereby damaging that prominent organ considerably.

"Fifteen thousand dollars to a cent on Montana!" exclaimed General Baltimore Bowie, in wild enthusiasm.

No one offered to take the bet; the sympathy of the crowd was entirely with the miner, and then, too, the general's credit was not as good as it might have been. No sane man in the town would have lent him five dollars on his own security.

"Say! this hyer ain't a fair shake!" exclaimed the Pet of the Niobrara, setting up on his beam-end and ruefully rubbing his damaged nose. "It's ag'in' all the rules to dig a feller in the ribs and scratch his horn at the same time."

Montana stood with folded arms, apparently quite satisfied to let the matter rest where it was, but Mr. Bludsoe, being a strange compound of bully and fool, had not yet got enough, although the fact was patent to the crowd that he was no match for the miner, notwithstanding his size, and that Montana had been playing with him, so far, as a cat plays with a mouse.

"Oh, I ain't ready to quit yet!" growled the bullwhacker, rising slowly to his feet. "I reckon that when I fight, I fight, and I don't hop round like a jumping-jack. Stand up like a man an' emme knock you down!"

The crowd roared at this novel challenge and even Montana

d. usual good humor of the bullwhacker had vanished and he ginning to wish that he had the power to tear Montana in limb.

"Not satisfied, eh?" the miner asked, a dangerous light shining in his dark eyes as he unfolded his arms and again assumed a defensive position.

"Satisfied, blazes!" and the bullwhacker made a ferocious blow at Montana, which would materially have damaged that gentleman if it had struck him, but it did not, for, with the skill of the practiced boxer, the miner easily parried it with his left arm and at the same time, with the open palm of his right hand, he smacked Mr. Bludsoe's face with a vim that fairly brought the tears to the big, goggle eyes of the mule-driver.

With a howl of rage Bludsoe rushed after his antagonist, showering blow after blow at him, but not one reached the mark, for Montana's steel-like arms easily threw them aside as the iron prow of the ocean steamer parts the breaking, white-topped billow; and then, as the bullwhacker paused, exhausted, puffing and blowing like a porpoise from his violent exertions, the miner, with a quickness which was really wonderful, smacked the giant once, twice and thrice in the face with the open palms of his hands, each hearty slap resounding like a pistol-shot.

Roused to new exertions by this outrage, and with a growl like a wild beast, the now infuriated giant rushed at Montana like a madman.

Not an inch now did the miner yield, but he stood his ground as firmly as though he were a solid rock imbedded in the earth's center; and as the bullwhacker rushed upon him he dealt him a terrible blow in the throat just under the chin—as awful a stroke as any eye in that crowd had ever witnessed.

Back went the giant's head and up went his arms; his fierce, onward rush checked, he trembled for a moment like a monstrous oak of the forest torn suddenly from its hold in the firm earth, and then Montana, pushing his advantage and seemingly resolved to end the contest without delay, closed in upon the half-stunned bully, and with a strength that few would have believed to have dwelt within his sinewy form, by some peculiar grip, raised the mule-driver from his feet and cast him clean over his head. Down with a thump, that seemed fairly to shake the earth, came the giant, all the fight knocked clean out of him by the violent concussion.

And Montana, pale and erect, and breathing just a trifle harder from his exertion, seemed to have grown a trifle taller as he stood in the moonlit street, every inch a man.

"Time!" exclaimed the general. "Deadwood City to a decayed orange on Montana!"

And well might the enthusiastic Bowie offer such odds, for the mule-driver had fainted. The shock had stunned him.

"The man's dead!" cried one of the bystanders, jumping a little too quickly to a conclusion.

"Oh, no, he ain't!" cried another; "git a bucket of water!"

"Whisky's better; he's more used to it!" suggested a third.

But, the Boss Bullwhacker of Shian recovered without the use of either of these two articles.

He gave a snort, opened his eyes and surveyed the crowd, gathered in anxious curiosity about him.

"The circus is over, gents, an' I hope that you've all got your money's worth; but ef you ain't satisfied I am!" he said, and then rose clumsily to his feet. "Pard, I axes yer pardon. I 'pass! Next time I undertake to fool round an airthquake I'll twist the tail of my lead mule!" And then he stalked off.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

At the hour of nine the deacon generally closed his store, Saturday night alone excepted; then, that being the general trading night of the week, he kept open till about eleven.

Tim had duly swung to and fastened the heavy window shutters, put the bar upon the door and made all secure for the night. Then he retired to his bunk, leaving Mr. Black busy at his desk, settling up the business of the day.

Tim bunked in a small room at the back of the store, which was partitioned off into two apartments, one of which the deacon occupied. A small entry, which led into the back-yard of the store, separated the two rooms.

We say back-yard, but "no pent up Utica" contracted that domain, for, unobstructed by fence or confine, the "back-yard" extended clear to the distant foothills, the skirmish-line, as it were, of the grim mountain peaks beyond.

Tim entered his scantily-furnished apartment, and scantily-furnished it was indeed. A couple of dry-goods boxes upon which a buffalo-robe and some coarse gray army blankets were spread served for a bed. Another box did service for a table, and the inside for a wardrobe, while a couple of shoe-boxes, stood up on end, supplied the place of chairs.

Tim closed the door behind him, and carefully locked and bolted it, then he proceeded to feel in the dark for the candle and matches which he had left upon the table.

Tim was a prudent young man, and all his worldly wealth was deposited in the little room. Therefore, during the day he kept the door carefully locked. There was no way of getting into the room except through the door—the only window being a small one, high up in the wall, looking into the front store.

In the daytime this afforded sufficient light, and even at night, when the store was fully illuminated, enough of the artificial glare came through the window to dimly light the room; but as the lights in the store had all been extinguished before Tim entered the room—a single one standing upon the desk of the deacon alone excepted—the apartment was in total darkness.

Tim found the matches and the candle, and endeavored to procure a light.



The first match ignited, sputtered, but went out.

"Dum the match!" exclaimed Tim, groping in the dark for another; and then to the ears of the boy, naturally keen of hearing, came the sound of suppressed breathing, just as if some one were hidden within the room, and was endeavoring to conceal the fact.

The hair of the boy fairly rose on end. The first thought of the terror-stricken youth was to endeavor to escape at once, and so he glided, as noiselessly as possible, to the door; but as he outstretched his hands toward the lock, the cold muzzle of a pistol was abruptly pressed against his forehead, and a hoarse voice—a voice only too well remembered—said, in a low, menacing whisper:

"Stop a bit, young man; don't be in such a hurry; I want to talk to you for a while."

It was the voice of Silver Sam that spoke—the masked road-agent of the upper gully.

Tim's knees trembled beneath him; but affrighted as he was, still more he would have been, to have encountered a stranger ruffian.

Familiarity breeds contempt they say, and in this case the old adage certainly leaned toward the truth, for Tim would surely have fainted with fear but that he recognized the voice of the stranger.

"Is that you, Mr. Sam?" he murmured.

"That's my handle, sonny," the road-agent replied; "and now, little man, jest go ahead and gin us a light. We kin talk better than in the dark."

"I ain't got a cent hyer, mister," Tim whined, in terror, his thought intent upon his treasure concealed in a stocking, stowed away in a corner up near the roof.

"Who sed you had?" responded the stranger, gruffly. "Jest you go ahead and strike a light so that we can talk in comfort, and mind your eye! Don't you try any gum games on me; it's a seven-shooter that's a lookin' at yer, and I've salavated better looking chaps than you air, just fur the fun of the thing. If you speak a word above your breath, or try to give an alarm in any way, this hyer durned old post-office will need a new clerk!"

"Oh, don't shoot!" murmured the boy, in terror.

"I don't intend to, sonny, ef I kin help it; but don't rub me ag'in' the grain or thar's no tellin' what will happen. Light the candle, and be quick about it; I ain't a-goin' to harm you if you act reasonable."

Thus reassured, Tim retraced his steps, and managed to light the candle, although his hand trembled like an aspen leaf.

And then, by the glimmering light, he turned and looked upon the stranger.

As he had expected, he beheld Silver Sam. His face was still concealed by the half-mask, from under which escaped the long, drooping mustache, so ferocious in its size; the conical-crowned broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his brows precisely the same as when Tim had first set eyes upon him, but all the rest of his person was concealed by a long black cloak, made with arms, domino fashion, from common paper muslin, and belted at the waist by a heavy strap, thus effectually disguising his person.

"Wha—what do you want?" murmured Tim, in an affrighted whisper.

"That letter that you were going to get for me," said the road-agent, sternly.

"Why, I got it all right."

"Oh, did you? Well, then, fork it over."

"But I have."

"Have what?"

"Give it to you."

"The blazes you did!" growled the masked man.

"Yes; I put it in the tree whar you told me, this very after noon."

"No, yer didn't, for I war thar jest about twilight, and nary paper did I see. What tree did you put it in?—a hollow oak tree on the left hand side of the West Gulch, 'bout half a mile this side of the Little Montana mine?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Tim, perceiving now the mistake he had made. "I missed that tree somehow—anyway, I thought that the oak was on the *right* hand side of the gulch as you went up."

"I sed left!"

"Mebbe you did; but I was so frightened that I forgot; so when I came to an oak tree, with a hole in it, a stone throw from the mine, I reckoned that it war the place, and stuck the letter in."

"Oh, you're a smart boy—you are!" the road-agent exclaimed, in contempt.

"But, mister, I was so frightened!" pleaded Tim, piteously.

"Is the deacon alone?" asked the disguised man, abruptly.

"Yes, I reckon so."

"The shanty is all closed and locked in front?"

"Ye—ye—yes."

Tim was at a loss to guess the meaning of these questions, except that they portended mischief.

"Well, I'll let you off this time, seein' that you did get me the letter, although you were idiot enough to put it into the wrong tree; but as I am goin' to have a leetle talk with the deacon and don't want to be disturbed, I shall take the liberty of locking you up in this hyer room. In the morning you kin raise an alarm, and then you'll be let out, 'cos it's easy to git a key to fit the door; it didn't bother me much to get in. Another p'int! Jest keep your mouth shut about me; don't let on to a living soul that you have ever see'd me; it will be money in your pocket, for I'll fix it so that we kin make a big raise together, one of these days, without any risk. Jest say in the morning, when they come to let you out, that you forgot and left the key on the outside of the door, and that you had no idee that you were locked in till you tried to git out."

"Oh, I'll do it!" Tim replied, his naturally cunning mind quickly perceiving how plausible the tale would be.

"All right; now we understand each other. Put out your light and tumble into your bunk as soon as you kin."

And with this parting caution the road-agent withdrew, taking the key of the door with him.

Noiselessly he closed the door, and noiselessly he turned the key in the lock, thus making Tim a prisoner.

The narrow passage led directly into the store, and the glimmer of light, burning on the desk, in front of which the deacon sat, making up his accounts, shone into the little entry.

With stealthy tread, noiseless as the creeping panther stealing in with all the caution of the feline tribe upon its prey, the road-agent advanced within the store.

The deacon, pen in hand, tctally unsuspecting of mischief, was poring over his book.

The first intimation he had of danger was feeling a heavy hand press upon his shoulder, and the cold muzzle of a pistol placed against his temple, as a low voice said:

"A few words, deacon, in regard to Juliet Oaks!"

## CHAPTER XXXII

### WHO SHE WAS.

#### JULIET OAKS!

The name rung in the ears of the affrighted store-keeper like knell of doom.

The deacon was not noted for his courage and now he trembled like an aspen-leaf.

"Juliet Oaks," he murmured, stammering forth the name like one utterly terror-stricken.

"Juliet Oaks! that is the name exactly, and I'll thank you for a leetle explanation in regard to her."

"What do I know of her?" Black exclaimed, assuming to be amazed at being thus interrupted.

"I reckon that my game just now is to ask questions, not to answer them!" replied the masked man, sternly. "Come, spit it out or I'll plaster brains all over this hyer shanty!"

"You wouldn't murder me?" the deacon cried.

"That's my lead exactly, if you try to fool with me. I mean business now, I tell you."

"You have me at a disadvantage," Black protested, vainly endeavoring to assume a courage which he possessed not, "but if I should raise my voice and give an alarm I could easily bring a dozen to my aid."

"Oh, you won't do that, deacon, I reckon," the road-agent retorted, evidently not at all alarmed by the threat.

"Why will I not?"

"Because, before you could give a single yelp I'd send your soul to its master, the devil, and I reckon that after that little operation is performed earthly help won't be of much use to you."

The deacon shivered all over as he listened to these ferocious words.

"And, since you've got sich an idea in your head, I'll just give you fair warning that you must be mighty careful how you open your mouth, 'cos I'm precious quick on the trigger and I'm apt to pop you now any time," the disguised man continued.

The deacon's under jaw dropped.

"So hurry up and go on with your funeral."

"I do not understand why you come to me," Black asseverated; "I do not know any one who answers to the name you mention."

"Oh, you don't know Juliet Oaks?"

"No, sir."

"And you have never known any one by that name?"

"No, sir."

"Now you're lying, deacon!" exclaimed the stranger, angrily, and I give you fair warning that I ain't going to fool much with you. I don't know whether this is your funeral or not, but I reckon that I'm going to make you toe the mark, sure. You lie, Thomas Black, you old sinner, when you say that you don't know Juliet Oaks!"

"I assure you, sir, that I do not know any one in Deadwood by that name!" the deacon persisted.

"Who said that she was in Deadwood?"

"I beg your pardon, sir; I understood you to say that she was."

"You're lying again!" the road-agent cried, sternly, "and I've half a mind to plug you, anyway; mebbe it will save the hangman a job, for you'll get caught at last in some of your little tricks, smart as you think you are!"

The store-keeper was evidently troubled and his little eyes glared viciously at the speaker, but he was too much under the influence of fear to attempt to resent the insulting insinuation.

"You know very well that Juliet Oaks is not in the flesh; you know that she died on the march from Cheyenne, and that she was buried where the prairie wolves howl and the free winds blow. Don't attempt to deceive or I'll make it cost you dear. Speak the truth if you can!"

The deacon was astonished; he stared at the masked man in utter amazement. It was plain that the stranger's knowledge astounded him.

"Now don't try to lie out of it and swear that you don't know about any such person!" and the road-agent was becoming impatient, perceiving that the store-keeper was not inclined to speak. "I know that you do know all about it and I'm going to make you speak or else I'll give Deadwood a chance to get another postmaster. Why, deacon, I begin to believe that you are deeper in the mud than I thought for, else you wouldn't be so precious



unwilling to spit out what you know about this matter. I took you to be merely an agent—a tool—but, mebbe, you're the principal, after all!"

Again the deacon shivered; it was plain that he was thoroughly frightened.

"What is it you wish to know?"

"You do know about Juliet Oaks, eh?"

"Ye—yes; now that you recall the affair to my mind, I do remember that there was such a person as you describe—"

"I ain't described anybody yet!" was the road-agent's sharp reminder.

"The name recalls the person," the deacon retorted, with dignity. "I do remember now that there was a Miss Juliet Oaks who started from Cheyenne with the party that I came with, and that she was taken sick—died, and was buried on the journey."

"You remember her distinctly now, do you?"

"Oh, yes, now that I come to think the matter over I remember her very well indeed."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place and save all this talk?" demanded the road-agent, gruffly.

"I had forgotten—"

"Bah! you remembered well enough! But, now to come down to the bed-rock, I want a little information out of you in regard to Juliet Oaks."

"Information—certainly!"

"Who placed Juliet Oaks under your protection at Cheyenne and to whom were you to deliver her here at Deadwood?"

The store-keeper stared blankly at his inquisitor, evidently completely surprised by the questions.

"Answer me at once!" cried the masked man, sternly; "don't wait to hatch up a lie or else may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

The hollow tube of the leveled revolver stared the deacon fully in the face, and there was a peculiar tremor in the fingers which grasped the weapon that fairly sent a chill to the heart of the affrighted man.

"For heaven's sake don't fire!" cried the store-keeper, huskily, and trembling in every limb.

"Tell me the truth, then—nothing but the truth!" cried Silver Sam, menacingly.

"I will, so help me Heaven, I will!" the deacon protested; "I will tell you all I know about the sad affair, which is very little. You are, I presume, a relative of the unfortunate young lady."

"Yes."

"A brother, I suppose."

"Father," responded the mask, gruffly.

The deacon was a little surprised at this declaration, for, judging from the voice of the road-agent, he was scarcely old enough to be a parent of the girl, but the unceremonious gentleman was not one that a quiet man would care to argue with, and so the store-keeper kept his thoughts to himself and did not attempt to question further.

"I know very little indeed about the young lady, sir," the deacon added. "I was introduced to her in Cheyenne on the morning that our expedition started. She was very much distressed, for she had expected her brother to meet her in Cheyenne. He was located at Deadwood and had written to her—her home was in Illinois, I think—to meet him at Cheyenne, but upon arriving there she found a letter awaiting her which stated that she was to join the first party which started for Deadwood, as he could not possibly leave his business long enough to permit of the journey to Cheyenne and back. Naturally, upon discovering the young lady's distress, I offered her my escort, as I was going right through to Deadwood. On the journey she was taken sick, died and was buried."

"And when you arrived here at Deadwood the brother came forward to inquire about the girl?"

"No, sir, I never heard anything about him at all."

"Strange, wasn't it?"

"Well—yes, I suppose so; I never gave much thought to the matter—it was none of my business."

"Dedon, no brother waited for Juliet Oaks here in Deadwood!" Silver Sam cried, sternly.

"I really know nothing about it, except what the lady told me," replied the deacon, with an appearance of great honesty.

"I think you lie, deacon, and I'll find it out before long, and if I do, Heaven have mercy upon you for I won't have any! Shut your eyes for five minutes and don't dare to open them!"

The store-keeper did as he was ordered, although in mortal terror.

When he opened them again he was alone.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE MINER'S RESOLUTION.

MIDWAY between the post-office and Dick Skelly's Big Horn saloon was one of the most noted places in the town. It was plain, one-story shanty constructed in the usual fragile manner common to the majority of the structures of which Deadwood City was composed. A door was in the center of the building, flanked by two windows, one on either side, which, after night-fall, were always closely covered by heavy shutters.

Over the door a modest sign projected, bearing the simple inscription:

### THE CLUB ROOM.

This was the principal gaming saloon of the town. Nearly every saloon in the place was devoted more or less to games of chance, for, on the gay and festive frontier, the saloon and the

gaming table take root long before the church and school; but so surely as the latter two gain a foothold, the former decrease and die.

Inside, the club room measured about twenty by fifty. On the right hand corner of the door was a plainly fitted up bar, behind which was the usual glittering display of bottles containing the creature comforts so dear to the heart of the average mortal.

The club room boasted all the games common to the frontier—Faro, the "tiger" of civilization; Monte, the "grizzly bear" of Mexican society; Roulette, *la belle Paris' flower*; Chuck-a-lock and the Sweat-board, native to the Sunny South and the wild western land.

At the further end of the room a couple of round tables afforded accommodations for short-card parties.

The proprietor of the Club Room was a tall, gaunt man, known far and wide as Old John Brown; a man of wondrous strength of arm as many a turbulent miner, who had marched into the saloon bent on mischief, had discovered to his cost.

Report said that there was no uglier man in all Deadwood, when the fit seized him, than Old John Brown; but be that as it may, it was very seldom indeed that there was any serious disturbance within the Club Room.

It was a little after ten o'clock when Hollowell strolled into the saloon in search of Montana.

The place was pretty well filled—as was usually the case, for all the games conducted there were popularly supposed to be "run on the square," to use the miner's lingo—but after taking a look at the clusters of men congregated around the various tables, the big miner came to the conclusion that his partner was not present, so he sauntered up to the faro table, where the master of the place, Old John Brown, presided in person, intending to ask if Montana had been in that evening, when that very identical personage entered through the front door of the saloon.

"Hallo!" said Hollowell in greeting; "I was jest hunting you. I thought, mebbe, you had gone home."

"Not yet," Montana replied, and from the peculiar look upon his face, the big miner guessed that his partner was out of temper.

"What's the matter—what's up?"

"Nothing that I know of. Why do you ask?"

"Well, you seem a little riled at something."

The two men were standing together, just by the end of the bar, secure from eavesdroppers.

"I am rather out of sorts," Montana confessed, in his quiet way. "I have been bothering my wits in regard to this bull-whacker's desire to fasten a quarrel upon me, and also in regard to the enmity which some officer of the fort evidently bears me."

"Christmas! you don't say so?" was Hollowell's exclamation.

"Oh, yes, and I've just spotted the man. He said openly in this very saloon this evening, that I was a rascal, and but a little better than a thief; and that if he caught me robbing any of the soldiers of his command he would have me laid by the heels in a twinkling."

"Mighty big chap, ain't he, hey?" and Hollowell's face expressed the contempt he felt for the officer.

"Yes. Can you guess who it is?"

"Blamed if I kin! I reckon that I would tackle him, jest fir greens. If I heard him crowing so durned loud, I'd cut his comb fer him, you bet."

"Major Germaine," Montana added, and Hollowell started in astonishment.

"Blazes! you don't say so?"

"Fact! sure as yer born!"

"What has he got against you?"

"I am in his way."

"How so? I don't understand."

"He's one of Miss Mercede's admirers."

"Oh! that's the way the cat jumps, is it?"

"That is about it. He is determined to get rid of me if he can. Perhaps he thinks that he can frighten me out of the town," and Montana laughed quietly to himself as he spoke.

"I reckon that you won't take water so easy; but I say, Montana, you are really arter the gal, ain't yer?" asked Hollowell, inquisitively.

"Oh, no; it is jest the other way. She's after me."

"Oh, get out!"

"Fact! Don't she come to the mine? Do I seek her?"

"No, but—"

"But what?"

"I guess you've got a kinder of a sort of liking fer her, even if you won't own it."

"Well, a man must be more than mortal not to admire a pretty girl, even though he knows that she can never be anything to him," Montana said, slowly.

"How do you know that?" Hollowell questioned. "Thunder! any one can see with half-an-eye that's she's awful sweet on you; but about this hyer military chap. He talked pretty plain."

"Yes, extremely plain," with a grimace.

"You ain't a-going to stand that sort of thing?"

"No, I don't think that I shall; I know of no reason why I should. He's the commanding officer of this post, but I reckon that fact doesn't give him any right to abuse or slander."

"Not a mite!"

"I have tried to avoid trouble ever since I came to this town, and have succeeded pretty well, too; but in this case to pass by such an affront tamely would be too much."

"Well, I reckon it would!" Hollowell exclaimed, indignantly.

"What do you intend to do about it?"

"Call Major Germaine to an account the very first time I meet him," replied the miner, quietly, but with determined resolution in his voice.

"Good for you! The durned skunk! to go and lie about a



man behind his back!" and the big miner looked the honest indignation he felt.

"He can't very well deny his words, since he uttered them in public and in the presence of witnesses; and he has got to take them back or answer for them."

"S'pose he refuses to do either?"

"I don't see how he can very well. He's a soldier, trained to the use of arms; he would be utterly disgraced if he refused to make good his words. At any rate I'm going to get even with him. He has said publicly that I am a rascal and only a little better than a thief; now it's my turn, and I'm going to tell him to his face that he's a blackguard and a liar."

"Say, are you heeled?" asked Hallowell, abruptly.

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"Because he is sure to be; I never saw him yet without his side-arms, and in this little affair you mustn't let him get any p'ints on you, you know."

"Oh, I'm all prepared," Montana answered, with a smile.

"Some way, I've been anticipating trouble ever since I had that first tussle with the bullwhacker."

"You polished him off! Ha! ha!"

"Yes; I reckon that he won't attempt to 'climb' me any more."

"When are you going to settle this little affair with the major?"

"To-night, if I can. No time like the present; I hate to have anything on my mind," the miner replied, quietly. "He generally drops in here during the evening, and I came here to-night expressly to meet him. There's not a more public place in town than this—not one better for my purpose, and if he steps inside these doors to-night, he won't go out again until he and I come to an understanding!"

"Good on your head!" cried Hallowell.

And hardly had the words escaped from the lips of the big miner when the door opened and Major Germaine appeared.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### AN AWKWARD CONFESSION.

FOLLOWING the major came Lieutenant Perkins.

Both of the officers were in undress uniform and wore around their shoulders the short dark blue cloaks so much affected by military gentlemen.

The two officers were well armed, for their dainty nickel-plated revolvers could plainly be distinguished belted to their waists.

They came sauntering into the saloon evidently bent upon amusement only, and as they glanced carelessly around their eyes fell upon the Montana mine partners.

Both of the military gentlemen nodded to Hallowell, but affected not to see Montana; then they advanced to the bar and ordered two cock-tails.

"Thar's your man," Hallowell observed, in an undertone to Montana.

"Yes, I'll go for him in a minute. Let him get his drink, though; I hate to disturb a man when he is enjoying himself," was Montana's quiet rejoinder.

The cock-tails were compounded by old John Brown's urbane barkeeper, Little Billy, as he was commonly termed, and shoved across the counter in the graceful manner peculiar to the tribe, "Bar-keep," but, just as the two officers reached out their hands for the savory decoction they were suddenly interrupted.

Through the doorway of the saloon came the giant bullwhacker, Mister Bludsoe, the Pride of the Niobrara—the boss of the Shian mule-drivers.

"Wa-al, durn my ole mule's left hand tail!" Bludsoe ejaculated, at the top of his lungs, thereby attracting the attention of all the assembled miners, "ef I ain't jest in time! Will I h'ist! Wa-al now, I don't often drink, but when I do, it's jest about this time. Brigadier, you do me proud!" and he nodded gravely to Germaine, who did not appear to be at all pleased at the free and easy style of the bullwhacker. "I reckon that this hyer young cuss is a feller sodger of yourn!" and then he nodded to Perkins, who simply stared at him in a manner calculated to set a sensitive man's teeth on edge, but it didn't have the slightest effect upon the callous-nerved plainsman. "Glad to meet you, young man," he continued; "you don't look over and above well; swallowed a ramrod, hain't ye! bad thing for the innards; wash it down with a gallon or two of whisky and mebbe you'll feel better."

"Oh! he warn't no saint was Jim;  
Them engineers are pretty much all alike;  
Whisky straight for me, young man,  
An' a leetle peppermint to make it bite!"

These last two lines were evidently intended as an injunction to light-haired Billy.

"Stamps, old man; we do business on a cash basis in this hyer ranche!" was the barkeeper's blunt reminder.

The boss bullwhacker of Shian drew himself up indignantly.

"Kin I believe my ears?"

"You ought to; they're big enough," responded Billy, facetiously, taking the liberty, so freely enjoyed by all well-regulated dispensers of the cup which cheers, and does inebriate, to joke with his customers.

"An' when I raise the yell of set 'em up ag'in, do you demand stamps in advance?"

"You bet!"

"No stamps, no bug-juice?"

"That's my platform!"

"Billy, gay young snoozer with the auburn ha'r!" exclaimed

Mr. Bludsoe, pathetically, "cast your eyes back in the dim future! Look forward a few years hence over the past! Kin you not remember how the boss bullwhacker of Shian set 'em up like water, an' made bug-juice as free as this hyer air we breathe? An' whar the great American eagle screams, Billy, fur two cents I'd throw four thousand dollars at yer!"

The saloonites snickered. The boss from Shian had not sojourned long in Deadwood, but he had managed to make himself a pretty prominent character in a very short time.

"What's the price of eggs?" asked a voice from the back part of the saloon.

And then again there was a very perceptible snicker. The discomfiture of the Pet of the Niobrara was still fresh in the minds of the crowd, and all those within the room who had not witnessed the affair had heard the particulars related.

"When a man sez eggs to me it means fitel!" roared Bludsoe. "Jes' cackle like a hen an' I'm fur you! Come out of thar you hen-fruit seeker, an' lemme tan you! Whisky straight, Billy, an' no water, for it makes me sick, it's so bad!"

"Yes, yes, that's all right, but who pays—who liquidates, that's what I want to know—that's the question before the meeting!" the barkeeper exclaimed, placing the whisky bottle upon the counter as he spoke, but keeping a tight grasp upon it.

"An' my face ain't good for it?" cried Bludsoe, reproachfully.

"No; we do business for cash!"

"Ain't my face the same as cash?"

"No, it ain't!"

"I'll toss up with you, Billy; heads I win, tails you lose!"

"Played out."

"Wa-al tails I win, heads you lose!"

"You're a fraud!" exclaimed the barkeeper, in disgust.

"Come outside an' I'll wrestle ye fur it; gi'n you the under grip, too!"

"Oh, get out! Do you think I want to fool wid a brick-house?"

And considering that the giant was as big as three of Billy, it was not exactly a fair shake.

"Billy, I war only jokin' with you!" Bludsoe said, soothingly. "Why, ole man, I wouldn't hurt a ha'r of yourn fur four million of dollars. I'm a-drinking with this gentleman," and he indicated the major as he spoke. "Ain't that so, commander-in-chief?"

"Give the gentleman what he wants!" the soldier said, shortly, evidently annoyed, but plainly convinced that the easiest way to get rid of the bore was to pay for his liquor.

"Do you see that, Billy? The commander-in-chief knows me! Whisky—an' the best you've got in the shanty—none of yer common bug-juice for me! I'm a gentl'man, I am! You kin believe it, 'kase I say so myself!" and filling out a tumbler two-thirds full of whisky, he tossed the potent liquor into his capacious mouth and swallowed it at a single gulp.

"Ah-a! that's the stuff!" he cried, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "That goes to the right spot; burns clare way from my mouth to my gizzard. Three drinks of that an' a man would want to kill his grandmother!"

The two officers drank their cock-tails, the major tossed three silver quarters over in payment, and the two turned as if to depart. But the bullwhacker got right in the way of Germaine and slapped him familiarly on the shoulder with his huge paw.

"Say, skin me fur lariats! but I reckon you're the very identical cuss that I've bin a lookin' fur. What mought your name be, stranger?" he exclaimed.

The soldier drew himself up haughtily, evidently annoyed at being thus accosted.

"My name, sir, is Major Germaine."

"Germaine!" and the bullwhacker scratched his head for a moment, pretending to be absorbed in thought. "Germaine!" he repeated; "wa-al, I reckon that's the name. You're the man I want, stranger, I guess."

"I think that you have made some mistake," said the major, stiffly.

"I reckon that I hain't! I've got a powerful mem'ry I tell yer! Major, I reckon that I owe you 'bout thirty dollars!"

The bystanders looked astonished, and the major could hardly conceal his anger.

"Oh, well, sir, we can settle that some other time," and the soldier made a movement to get by Bludsoe, but the giant again brought his big paw down upon the shoulder of the officer.

"Oh, no, not by a durned sight! No man shall go round this hyer town an' say that Jimmus Bludsoe owes him a cent while thar's plenty of paper an' ink an' pens, an' I kin gi'n my note for the amount! No, sir-ee! I'm a squar' man! you bet me ten dollars furst an' then twenty arterwards that I could welt that deer-skin chap, Montana thar, an' you won, easy as kin be, fur he salivated me fur all I was worth!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### RIGHT TO THE POINT.

"YES, sir!" Bludsoe continued, speaking at the top of his voice. "You bet me like a man, and like a little man I went in and lost it! You sed that he hadn't any fun in him, but he's chock full of fun, fuller'n a tick, you bet! Furst he h'isted me up an' wiped me 'round in the mud, jes' as if I didn't cost nothin', an' wasn't worth a cent, nohow; an' then he fit me with eggs—basted me all over wid 'em, jes' as ef I were a durned slice of ham a-gwine to be fried, an' when he got through, bay-rum and cologne were nowhar; then he smacked my face an' pasted me in the stumjack, an' tickled me in the throat, an' had more good ole fun wid me



an'—wa-al, I'm satisfied, I am! Thar ain't nothin' of the hog 'bout me. When a man flaxes me 'til I can't stand, I'm allers satisfied that I've got enough. You sed that thar warn't no fun in him, but thar is, an' I owe you thirty dollars, an' ef you'll lend me two cents fur a stamp I'll gi'n you my note at ninety days for the ducats!"

The bystanders had listened to this long rigamarole in great astonishment. Nearly all within the room knew that both of the two men—Montana and the major—were admirers of the pretty storekeeper, Mercedes Kirkley, and they easily guessed that a woman was at the bottom of the mischief.

The men of Deadwood were shrewd fellows, and like the old sultan in the Eastern tale, who cried out, "Seek for the woman!" whenever any trouble came to his knowledge, they fully believed that in nine cases out of ten, sweet, bewitching woman is to blame for all mischief in this world.

The major was red with rage, and with both hands he nervously grasped his revolvers, but, situated as he was with his back to Montana, he was at a fearful disadvantage if the miner chose to assume the offensive.

But Montana never stirred; he was leaning quietly on the counter, Hallowell's big form between him and the soldier. Only the peculiar pallor of his face—a sure sign of terrible anger to those that knew his ways—and the ominous sparkle of his eyes betrayed aught of interest in the scene in which, it was plain to all, he must be a prominent actor.

The keeper of the place, forsaking the faro-table over which he had been presiding, hurried forward. He saw that there was going to be trouble, and he resolved that it should not take place on his premises if he could prevent it.

The lookers-on took advantage of the advance of the landlord to quietly get out of the range of fire.

In these impromptu encounters it's ten to one that the bystanders get hit before the principals.

"Hold on, gentlemen!" old John Brown exclaimed, striding in between the two. "I won't have any shooting-match in my place. The last fight in hyer cost me fifty dollars for looking-glasses and fixin's. If you must take a crack at each other go outside!"

"I reckon that you don't see me handling any weapons, Mr. Brown," Montana observed, never moving in the least from his lounging position, and with both his hands thrust into his pockets.

Neither Brown nor any one else in the room could say with truth that they saw Montana handling weapons, and they rather wondered that he took matters so easy, weaponless—without means of defense—and the major grasping a revolver butt with each hand. The odds seemed all against the miner.

But Montana was no fool, neither was he a child to walk weaponless in the midst of armed men. The pockets in the hunting-shirt-like coat were dummy ones—merely slits through which the hands went, and on the thigh of each leggin was a secreted revolver.

Montana's hands, apparently in his pockets, grasped two revolvers. No need to draw the hammers back to prepare for action, for they were self-cocking weapons, and a single pull on the trigger raised the hammer and dispatched the ball.

And if the major had attempted to commence hostilities, relying upon the fact that the miner was apparently unarmed, long before the soldier could have cocked his weapons, Montana would have put a ball through him with the self-cockers.

"Go outside, gentlemen!" the saloon-keeper continued. "You can't fight hyer! I ain't a-fitting up club-houses every day in the week, and lookin'-glasses cost a small fortune in this hyer town."

Montana straightened himself up and took a step forward; Germaine drew his weapon in an instant, but old John Brown was as quick as the soldier, and as he had previously cocked his revolver he had the advantage.

"None of that, major!" he cried. "Ef thar's goin' to be any shootin', I reckon that I'll have furst fire! I'm a peacemaker, I am! and I'll jest salivate the furst man that crooks his fingers fur a fight in this hyer shanty! I ain't a-goin' to have my property destroyed!"

Old John Brown was thoroughly in earnest; he meant business every time, to use the terse expression common to the frontier. He had the soldier at a disadvantage, and the major knew it.

It was rough though—miner lingo again—for Germaine felt sure that he had the best of the Little Montana man, and that before the miner could draw a weapon he could easily send him to that long home from whence the traveler returns not.

"As far as I am concerned, your property, Mr. Brown, is in no danger, unless I am attacked, and then I most assuredly will defend myself to the best of my ability," Montana said.

"Thar ain't a-goin' to be any attacking in this hyer shanty now, you kin bet all your rocks onto that!" the landlord exclaimed, decidedly. "As I said afore, I'm a peacemaker, I am! and I reckon I'll lay the furst man out that cocks his we'pon colder'n a wedge. If you must fight, cl'ar out into the street, and don't go to disturbing the peace and good order of my establishment!"

"As I have just said, Mr. Brown, as far as I am concerned there will be no trouble in your place, unless I am forced to protect myself," Montana observed, in his full, deep voice, yet which was clear as the tone of a silver bell. "Maybe Major Tremaine thinks that he has the best of me, seeing that his weapon is out and mine is not; but we can tell that better after the skirmish is over. I don't jump on any man unawares; I'm not that kind of a man, but if I was, I reckon I could have settled the major's hash when he had his back to me and before he had time to draw his revolver. There is a reckoning to come between us, and I made up my mind when he entered that door to-night that I would have a few plain words with him before he went out. This big mule driver here has brought things to a focus a little

sooner than I intended, but it don't matter much, anyhow. I reckon that there's a few in the room now that know what I am driving at."

Half a dozen men in the crowd exchanged glances. They had been present when Germaine had denounced Montana during the early part of the evening, and of course they understood the miner's meaning.

"Major Germaine," said Montana, fixing his clear, fearless eyes full upon the soldier's face, "I have been told that in this very room this evening you said in public that I was a rascal, and but little better than a thief, and that if you caught me playing cards with, and fleecing, any man of your command, you would have me drummed out of town. Is that true?"

"I do not admit that you have any right to question me!" the soldier exclaimed, contemptuously. "And as for anything that I may have said, I am generally able to back up my words."

"That is exactly what I want!" Montana replied, a peculiar light beginning to sparkle in his dark eyes. "I want to find out first if you said those words, and if you did—as I fully believe—I'm going to make you back them up. Now then, as man to man, I ask you, did you say I was a rascal and but little better than a thief, and that, in a certain case, you would have me drummed out of town?"

"Yes, I did!" cried Germaine, red in the face with rage; "and I will, too; I'll be as good as my word! There's too many chaps of your kidney about this town now, and I intend to make a public example of you on the first opportunity."

"Oh, you do?" retorted Montana, sarcastically. "How long since I enlisted in your regiment, eh? or who gave you power over a free American citizen? You drum me out of town! Well, I reckon that it will take all the blue-coats that you've got up yonder in your durned old fort, or I mistake the men of Deadwood mightily. Major Tremaine, I've got just about ten words to say to you, and I'll make those ten words good with my body: you are a blackguard and a liar!"

And then there came an ominous silence in the room; just for the moment that succeeded Montana's ringing defiance all within the apartment were still as mice; you could have heard a pin drop.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### RETRACT OR FIGHT.

GERMAINE had thrust his revolver half-way back into its holster, but with the defiance so boldly uttered by the miner again he drew forth the weapon; the major had little idea that Montana's strong right hand clasped securely the butt of the self-cocker, and that, long before he could have raised the hammer of his weapon, Montana's bullet would have pierced him through and through.

Lucky was it then for Major Germaine that old John Brown interfered to stay the strife.

"Hold on, major; quit fingerin' that we'pon, or by the holy smoke! I'll put a ball plum through you!" the landlord yelled; and there was no mistaking old Brown's determination. That he would be as good as his word not a man within the room doubted.

"Oh, let 'em shute!" the boss bullwhacker howled, at the top of his lungs. "Wot kind of a hairpin air you, anyway, old Brown, to spile the fun? I'll bet fourteen thousand dollars that both on 'em misses the furst heat, an' that two outside coons, wid no consarn in the b'ilin', gits it!"

"I am insulted!" the soldier cried, in a great rage.

"I reckon that you commenced the fuss, major," old John Brown answered. The commander of the post was no favorite among the men of Deadwood. To use the expressions common among the miners, "he was too fresh!" "put on too much style!" "acted as if he was the boss of the town!" To sum all up in a single sentence, the jealousy and ill-feeling which generally exist in a fortified town between the garrison and the inhabitants were pretty strong in Deadwood. The soldiers looked upon the miners as interlopers, and openly said that they had no business at all in the Black Hills, and that if it wasn't for their warlike presence, the savage Sioux nation would slaughter them like sheep.

Upon their part, the miners retaliated that they were strong enough to whip all the Indians combined west of the Missouri, and that the blue-coats weren't worth shucks, anyway, in an Indian fight, and that they put on a heap of airs, acting as if they owned the town, and that Deadwood would be well rid of their company and would get on much better without than with them.

Few friends had the soldier in this quarrel; public opinion was almost entirely on Montana's side.

"No use of mixin' this hyer matter up, major," the landlord continued; "you commenced the fuss; I heered you myself, and I reckoned at the time that you were a leetle hasty in your remarks, but that is your affair and not mine; you're playing the game."

"Yes, and now that I've 'chipped' in, I 'call' you, major, and I want a 'sight' for my money!" Montana exclaimed, using the cant words peculiar to the famous game of poker.

"And suppose I refuse to accede to your request?" the soldier asked, a sneer upon his lips.

"Oh, I reckon that you won't refuse!" Montana exclaimed quickly.

"Of course not!" yelled Mr. Bludsoe. "Thunder an' lightnin'! a man's got to fite, when he's asked, 'cept with eggs—I bar eggs, every time!"

"Well, I don't know about that!" Germaine retorted, scornfully.

"It's either retract or fight!" the miner replied, calmly, but with evident determination in his voice.



"Oh, fite furst—allers fite furst an' 'splain arterwards!" cried Bludsoe; the Pet of the Niobrara was afraid that the affair would be settled peaceably. "Oh, go fur him, sodger chap! I'll go you the thirty ducats I owe you that he flaxes you the furst heat; he kin do it, he kin; chock full of fun, b'ilin' over; he kin fite ary polecat in the world in his own language!"

"Suppose I refuse to do either?" Germaine questioned. "I am commander of this post, and in the course of my official duties I am often called upon to pass judgment upon all sorts of rascals, and if I am obliged to fight every rogue that I judge, my hands would be full."

"Oh, you haven't judged me yet, Major Germaine!" Montana quickly replied, for the first time showing traces of passion in his face. "You have gone out of your way to attack my character, and now that I call you to an account for words openly spoken, you can't plead your rank as a privilege for your speech. As a man you stood up in this room and lied about me; it was as a man—a common man like myself—that you spoke, and not as Major Germaine, commander of this district; and as for that matter, if you were Sherman himself, the general-in-chief of the whole United States army, you shouldn't call me a rascal without being brought to a reckoning!"

"Sartin—of course!" cried Bludsoe, bent on mischief; "step up to the captain's office an' settle! That's the talk! Oh, sodger, you said that thar warn't no fun in him when he was chock-full of it. I were a stranger an' you roped me in. He mashed eggs over me, he did! an' I'm open to bet any man forty thousand dollars to the wag of a mule's tail that he's all fite from his teeth to his toenails! You heer my horn!"

"I reckon, major, that you hadn't ought to call a man names onless you kin either prove it or air willin' to fight," suggested an old gray-bearded miner in the crowd.

"Certainly!" exclaimed General Baltimore Bowie, who had been fast asleep with his head on a table at the back part of the room—the effect of too strong potations early in the evening—and who, waking up, had just comprehended what was going on; "it is a sound principle of law"—and the general advanced to the front of the saloon with uplifted finger—"that a judge cannot be called to account in private life for acts done upon the judicial seat; his ermined robes protect him; there is a divinity that doth hedge a judge—"

"I reckon that the major don't sit in judgment here!" exclaimed Montana, shortly, interrupting the old lawyer.

"Right, my young friend with the hirsute ornaments!" returned the general; "in private life a judge is but a man, and, as a man, must answer for his words and acts."

"Sartin sure, let 'em fite!" demanded the bullwhacker. "He sed he had no fun in him; let him try it on and see how it is himself!"

"Retract or fight!" was Montana's curt and aggressive call.

"And if I refuse to do either?" queried the major, loftily.

"Why, I'll force you to; I'll smack you across the face with my hand the first time I meet you, and, in addition, I'll post you through the whole town as a coward who is brave enough to assail a man behind his back, but who fears to make good his words to his face!"

The soldier uttered a cry of rage; it was very evident that he was frightfully excited.

"You shall have what you seek!" he cried. "I'll save the hangman a job!"

"Oh, keep your temper!" Montana retorted; "you are a disgrace to the uniform you wear, and I reckon that you never came to your rank by fair means, anyhow."

"It's to be a fight, then?" John Brown asked.

"Of course!" Bludsoe cried; "don't you see that both on 'em are sp'ilin' fur it? Oh, my everlastin' gizzard! I'll bet ary mule in my team that it will be sudden death when they git at it!"

"Thar's a bright moon outside, and I'll fix the thing, if both on you will be so kind and obliging as to step outside and settle it, in stead of sp'ilin' my plunder!" the landlord remarked.

"All right," Montana assented.

"I am satisfied," the major added.

"The major is to leave here first and take his position at the post-office, right in the middle of the street; then Montana is to march down a hundred paces. When you are both in position, I'll warn the folks to keep out of the way and give the signal to fire by counting one, two, three, *fire!* You kin advance at one and fire at three. I s'pose that neither one on you want a stopping time fixed?" and old Brown looked inquiringly at the soldier as he asked the question.

"No, time enough to stop when one of us is disabled!" answered Germaine, fiercely.

"All right; turn out then, boys, for the shootin'-match, and pass the word to clear the street!" Brown commanded.

yet not one time out of ten was there any damage done. There was plenty of yelling, "lots" of swearing, and a great amount of bloodthirsty talk; but, somehow, the matter was generally settled, after the desperate shooters had emptied the contents of their revolvers at each other, without doing the slightest bit of damage—excepting that, for the time being, the unlucky passers-by were compelled to take refuge behind the corners of the neighboring shanties, and wait for the close of the "fun" by all hands adjourning to the nearest saloon—and saloons were very near, always—and sinking enmity in a bowl of the potent bug-juice, as whisky is commonly termed in the Black Hills.

But Deadwood "saw another sight," when Major Germaine, the rather unpopular United States officer, and the miner, Montana, of the Little Montana Mine, stepped forth to mortal combat.

No drunken miners this time—no bullwhackers, eager for blood, but quite willing to be content with whisky instead, no brawling, swearing men, affrighting the ear of the night with their hoarse cries, and waking the slumbering sleepers with a start and snort of alarm, producing the impression that Deadwood's magic city was in the hands of Sitting Bull and his red gang.

"Business now, boys!" General Baltimore Bowie remarked, as he filed out of the saloon with the crowd. "Jest old business, gentlemen, and I'm open to bet an even thousand dollars that the major wings him. By Jove! he can shoot, he can! I've seen him snuff a tallow candle at thirteen paces nine times out of ten!"

"Oh, what are you givin' us?" cried the boss bullwhacker, in supreme disgust. He was right behind the general. "That sodger is a fraud! He beat me outen thirty dollars. He sed that that air miner chap hadn't any fun in him. No fun! Boys, the hind leg of a well regulated mule is a fool to the muscle that's in his arm. Say, old snoozer!" and in this undignified manner he addressed the general, "I'll go you four thousand dollars that Montana plugs him the furst heat!"

"Make it an even ten thousand dollars and I'm your man," replied the general, with that urbanity which so distinguished him.

"An' I'll hould the money, bedad!" the little Irishman, Paddy Pud, exclaimed.

He had just arrived upon the scene of action, attracted by the crowd.

"Oh, give us a rest!" cried an irreverent mocker in the crowd. "You couldn't either one of you pass out five dollars, ef it were to save yer!"

Loudly the Man from Shian protested that his personal check was good for a million, and the general denounced the aspersion as a slander, and declared that nothing but the blood of the offender would satisfy his wounded honor; but the two duelists were pacing off toward their appointed stations, and all banter ceased; the crowd were too anxious to see the fight to joke the worthies who were betting dollars when they lacked cents.

It was late, and all the stores in the town, with the exception of the whisky shops, were closed; but on the frontier whisky, like water, flows forever. Few people in the street, either, although there were still plenty of miners carousing in the different saloons, but the arrangements for the duel were proceeding so quietly that no commotion was excited.

Few, therefore, were present to witness the fight beside the loungers who had been within the club house when the trouble had commenced.

But of the witnesses attracted by the unusual crowd gathered at such an hour, there were two who commanded a full view of the ground, and yet whose presence was not suspected by any one.

And these two unseen and unsuspected witnesses were women—rivals, too, if the gossip of Deadwood could be believed, who said that pretty Mercedes Kirkley was "sweet" on good-looking William Jones, the "Montana" of the Little Montana Mine.

Mercedes' store had been closed about nine o'clock, as usual, and after putting up the shutters, designed more to protect the glass of the show-window from stray bullets, "rocks," big sticks, etc.—the common playthings of the sportive miner, dangerous, even in his drunken mirth, as a playful bear, and about as clumsy—the Chinese man-of-all-work had retired to his bed under the counter, there to sweetly dream of the day when he should return to the flat plains of his own loved eastern land, rich with the spoils of the western barbarians, safe from the jeers and thumps of the "Melican man."

The bower of Mercedes was in the second story; just a little "cubby-hole" sort of a room, but large enough to hold content, apparently, for the girl had fixed it up so that it looked as neat as a pin.

Instead of proceeding directly to bed, as was her usual custom, Mercedes took a seat by the one little window, which looked out upon the moonlit street, resting her head, in a dreamy sort of way, against the corner of the casement.

And there she sat until the minutes lengthened into hours, and the great moon came slowly up to her supreme altitude, and the street became quiet, deserted even by the tired miner, meandering with uncertain steps toward his rude cabin in the mountain gulch.

Lulled by the quiet of the balmy night, Mercedes had half closed her eyes in slumber—a dreamy trance wherein one face was ever before her, one voice ringing in her ears.

The noise of the sudden irruption of the crowd from the club room into the street aroused her, recalled her wandering fancies, and she rose, with a half sigh—for the dream-like reverie had been far sweeter than her waking thoughts—to retire to rest.

"Oh, no, it cannot be!" she murmured. "I am foolish to even think of such a thing. My oath to the dead and gone binds me. What have I to do with love? It has ever been to me a torment

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE UNSEEN WITNESS.

OUT into the moonlit street poured the crowd from the saloon, such and every man anxious to see the fight.

It was not every day that the good people of Deadwood had a chance to witness a "first class" affair.

Impromptu "shooting-matches" were common enough, the principal actors therein being, as a general rule, drunken miners from the neighboring foot-hills, brave fellows enough, and always well armed; but their skill in handling the sharp-shooting revolvers was nothing to boast of. Two-thirds of them could hardly hit the side of a barn a hundred feet away, and although their intentions were good enough, and their desire for "blood" strong,



not a blessing. And what dreadful taint is it that lurks within my blood that I should care for the man that I ought to hate?"

And Mercedes, gazing with vacant eyes out into the street, now bathed in the moon's broad beams, murmuring these disconnected sentences with white lips, suddenly saw a sight that caused her heart to beat with unwonted quickness.

Out from the little crowd came two men, the revolvers in their hands shining brightly in the moonlight; one paced slowly up the street, the other in the opposite direction.

At the first glance Mercedes recognized the two. Familiar to her eyes indeed were the forms of Major Germaine and Montana, the miner.

The girl was too used to the customs of the border not to understand the meaning of this prelude; it was the beginning of a tragedy!

"They are about to fight!" she murmured, "and for what cause?" and then over her brain swept a sickening thought. The soldier hated the miner, and she would be blind, indeed, not to guess why he hated him.

"Oh, better that I were dead and sleeping by Juliet's side in the quiet grave than that he should peril his life on my account!" she cried, despairingly. "Oh, worthless girl that I am to put his life in peril, and yet, wretched creature! I feel sometimes as if I ought to kill him with my own hand, and so avenge Juliet's wrongs!"

Spell-bound at the window the girl posed, unable to move.

And the other woman—gazing, too, with staring eyes, but with eyes fiercely set in their glare?

It was the tawny beauty, Dianora Campbell.

Her hotel was on the opposite side of the street, just below the club room, and as chance would have it, she had been sitting by the side of the window, waiting for her father to return, when the crowd came pouring out of the saloon into the street.

"Oh, it's my stubborn gentleman again!" she exclaimed. "If that officer hits him, good-by to my plans then! What a fool he is to risk his life against that man, who is probably a dead shot! Well, if he's killed, I shan't have the pleasure of conquering him, that's all. He'll be the first man that ever escaped me, that I made up my mind to have!"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### SPECULATING ON THE CHANCES.

COOLLY and resolutely the duelists paced off to their stations, out Montana was by all odds the cooler of the two.

Germaine had allowed his anger to get the better of him; besides, to a certain extent, he had been forced into this quarrel. He had not intended to give the miner a chance at him. He was brave enough, but he preferred always to have the advantage on his side, but in this matter "the honors were easy." A fair fight it was and no favor; man to man and pistol to pistol, and Heaven defend the right! to use the old end of the herald's proclamation when he threw down the truncheon, the signal for the knights to enter the lists and do battle unto the death.

Along with the major came Lieutenant Perkins as a sort of a second, and the two officers exchanged a few words as they promenaded up the street.

"Well, you're in for it, major," the lieutenant remarked.

"Yes, but I didn't intend that the matter should take this turn," replied Germaine. "I wanted the fellow to gamble with some of the men so that I could have a chance to lay him by the heels, but the chap has been too smart for me."

"Is he anything of a shot?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"The chances are that he isn't."

"I don't know anything about it."

"You are going to try to wing him, I suppose?"

"Yes, if I can," the major answered, grimly and from between his set teeth. "The fellow has forced this thing upon me, and I intend to make him pay dearly for his rashness if I am able to."

"If this thing gets out at head-quarters it might make trouble," Perkins suggested. The lieutenant was a prudent man and always kept a wary eye to the main chance.

"Oh, no one is likely to hear of it; and if I should be called to an account I can easily represent it all as a street fight. I was attacked by a ruffian and was compelled to use my weapons in self-defense."

"Yes, that would do; but, how are you going to manage this thing—going to open fire at the word?"

"Yes, and no. If he is not an expert used to smelling gunpowder in this sort of way, the chances are ten to one that he will begin firing the moment the word is given and blaze away until his weapon is empty. My game is a simple one, then. The moment the word is given I give him two shots; that will probably startle him, and, thinking that I will wing him before he gets a chance, he undoubtedly will blaze away as fast as he can, and as he will be nervous the chances are that he'll miss me; then, after his weapon is empty, we'll be at pretty close quarters, and I'll have four shots left—"

"And then you'll hit him, sure!" the lieutenant exclaimed.

"Yes, I think I stand a chance to, unless he gets frightened and runs; in that case I'll let him off easy, for he'll never dare to show his head in Deadwood again, or if he does he'll be apt to keep a mighty still tongue in his head," observed the major, complacently.

By this time the two had arrived at the appointed station and the lieutenant with a parting salutation withdrew to a safe distance from the field of action.

Perkins had no faith in Montana's marksmanship and was fully convinced that his bullets would fly wide.

Hallowell had accompanied the miner to his post and a few words were exchanged between the two on the way there.

"Darn that cuss!" Hallowell growled. "I wouldn't have given him this chance, nohow! You had him in the saloon—had the 'drop' right on him, and you could have peppered him—he deserved it, too. Any man that goes and talks 'bout another man ought to keep his eyes open arterwards, and if the second chap salivates him, good enough; he started the funeral!"

"Oh, let the man have a fair show," was Montana's careless response.

"Christmas! You're jest as cool as an iceberg!" Hallowell exclaimed, in great admiration.

"Old fellow, I hold life so cheaply that I don't care whether I win or lose," Montana replied.

"Are you good with the poppers?" the big miner asked, a spice of anxiety in his tone.

"Oh, pretty fair, I guess I could hit a cow fifty feet off."

Hallowell shook his head.

"Partner, I'm afeard he's got the best on you. Them sodgers hain't got nothin' else to do but to shoot pistols and sich like."

"Well, old man, I've faced a grizzly bear with nothing but a revolver in my paw, when it was certain death if I didn't hit her in a vital place at the first crack—and I live to tell you of it."

"Oh, State of Maine! gi'n it to him!" was Hallowell's emphatic demand.

"Plant me decently if I go under," and Montana laughed as he made the request.

"Oh, don't talk that way!" and Hallowell was very much affected. "If this chap has rung in a cold deal on you, durn me to thunder, if I don't go for him with a meat-ax! I don't take no stock in these pop-guns, but I'd 'climb' him, and four more like him, with a good-sized ax and take a contract to lay the hull caboodle of 'em out."

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" old John Brown called out. He stood by the side of the street midway between the two.

"Ready!" responded the major, promptly.

"Ready," answered Montana, in the next breath.

"Oh, sock it to him if you love me!" cried Hallowell, and then he hurried away.

The crowd which had been collected in little groups, in the center of the street, instantly scattered in all directions, each man eager to secure some available position from which to witness the coming fight without exposing his precious person to the risk of receiving a stray revolver-ball.

Not a man in the crowd but felt sure that when the "fun" did open it would be hot and heavy.

Germaine, as a military man, of course, was a fighter, and Montana, within the last few days, had given such proofs of his skill in fisticuffs that nine out of ten in the crowd believed that the soldier had caught a tartar.

And no stronger advocate of this opinion was there than the Boss Bullwhacker of Shian!

Safely ensconced behind a large drygoods box, which happened to be standing on the verge of the sidewalk, his nose—glowing in its rich tints, like a new-lighted beacon, and just showing above the edge of the box—he was squatting down on his haunches like a huge frog, and as he squatted he expressed his opinions of the subject now before the meeting.

"He sed that that deer-skin-kivered chap had no fun in him, he did. He led me on like the young heifer a-goin' to the slaughter. He bet me ten dollars that I couldn't flax him, an' he was right; right for ducats, every time, for that deer-skin brute sloshed me 'round jes' as easy as my lead-mule kicks a stranger with his hind-foot, an' the pilgrim is a-putting on the collar! Now, he's a-goin' to see how it is himself. I owe that sodger cuss thirty dollars, but I stand ready to forgive the debt ef Montana plugs him!"

"I am agreeable to bet any gentleman fifteen thousand dollars that the major wings him in the first three shots!" cried the old general, popping up his head from behind a barrel on the opposite side of the street, "and if any gentleman doubts that I possess the funds I will put up my note for the amount!"

"I'll go you four dollars and two bits that you can't write!" cried the bullwhacker, promptly.

And there was a laugh, and then a general "hush!" went up on the air. The moment for opening the contest was near at hand, and not a man on the ground but believed that either one or both of the actors would fall in the struggle.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE SHOOTING-MATCH.

OLD John Brown looked up the street and then he looked down. Motionless as statues stood the two men, the moonbeams dancing upon the polished surface of the weapons which they grasped in their hands.

The saloon-keeper saw that both were ready for the fight. He believed that the advantage lay with the soldier, thinking that he was certainly more expert in the use of the pistol than the miner; and so, in order that the major might not have time to take deliberate aim between the word one and the word fire, he rattled out the sentence as fast as he could.

"One—two—three—fire!" he cried.

"Crack! crack!" went Germaine's revolver, the soldier firing almost on the word.

Montana had not even raised his weapon.

A long breath was drawn by the lookers-on, so deep, so intense the inspiration that it sounded on the air like the convulsive gasp of some huge animal.



Motionless stood the miner, and one and all looked anxiously toward him; so still he stood that the spectators believed that he was hit, and even the major was deceived and glared anxiously at him, stepping forward two or three paces, thinking to behold his antagonist totter and fall.

And then, in that moment of suspense, just as the spectators were beginning to think that the miner had been stricken by some strange kind of palsy which fettered his limbs and yet permitted him to stand erect, like a flash up came the right arm of Montana, and the moment that the pistol was on a line with the shoulder, apparently without taking any aim at all, the miner fired—one solitary shot.

And as the white smoke curled up on the air, almost with the report of the revolver, the major uttered a stifled groan and reeled back a step or two.

"By Jove! he's hit!" old John Brown exclaimed, unable to repress the exclamation.

And indeed it was the most marvelous shot that the men of Deadwood had ever seen.

Lieutenant Perkins, perceiving that the major had been wounded, sprung forward to his assistance.

The miner's arm, after the firing of the single shot, had dropped back listlessly to his side, and he stood, quietly surveying his antagonist, evidently waiting for the major to signify whether he wished the affair to go on or not.

"You are hit, major!" Perkins exclaimed.

"Yes, the scoundrel has put a ball through the fleshy part of my arm!" the soldier cried, through his clenched teeth. "An accidental shot! I'll bet a thousand dollars that he can't do it again!"

Germaine was terribly excited.

"Will you continue? You are wounded in your right arm," and the lieutenant perceived the blood streaming down upon his hand and staining the polished butt of the revolver.

"Continue!" cried the major, in a rage; "by all the furies! I'll kill him on the next fire! I'm not disabled yet, and if my right arm gives out the left remains. Retire, lieutenant, retire!"

The soldier was plucky! there was no mistake about that, for he was evidently suffering extreme pain. The blood was running quite freely down his arm and his face was quite pale.

Perkins ran back to his former position. He fully agreed with the major in regard to the shot being an accidental one, for the miner had, seemingly, taken no aim at all, and the distance was about as great as a revolver could be depended upon to throw a ball with sufficient force to do mischief.

The opinion that the excellent shot was only a chance one was general among the bystanders, one decided exception only—Mr. Bludsoe. The Pride of the Niobrara was quite satisfied that Montana had "plugged"—as he expressed it—the soldier on purpose.

"Oh, he kin do it, he kin!" he cried to the old gray-bearded miner crouched with him behind the box. "Say, was you round when he pated me with those eggs? Hit me every time—never missed once—the most onhealthy eggs I ever see'd! I'll bet the hind-legs of two mules that the hen had the lockjaw when she laid them eggs!"

Bludsoe's speech was brought to a speedy end by a movement for action on the part of the major.

He advanced some twenty feet, raised his arm—an operation that caused him to wince perceptibly with pain—and took deliberate aim right at Montana's face. The pale features of the miner, with the full light of the moon shining upon them, afforded a splendid mark. The soldier evidently intended to kill his antagonist, if it was in his power to do so. The major was an excellent shot, but in this instance his terrible eagerness to surely compass the death of the miner overreached itself. "To make assurance doubly sure," he dwelt too long on his aim before he pulled the trigger; his wounded arm trembled, and that tremor saved Montana's life, for the ball whizzed within an inch of his head, quite near enough to whistle in his ear.

Then, like the movement of a machine, up came the strong right arm of the miner. The weapon fired as soon as it was at the level, no aim again, apparently, being taken for all that any one could see.

Again the major uttered a groan—again he reeled, and this time the pistol dropped from his grasp, and he clutched the wounded right arm with the left hand.

"Curse me, if he ain't hit ag'in!" cried old John Brown, in wonder at this second miraculous shot.

"No accidental shot this time!" went round from mouth to mouth.

Perkins, as before, rushed to the assistance of his superior officer.

"The scoundrel has hit me in the same place again!" the major gasped, beginning to become exhausted from the loss of blood.

"What, in the right arm?"

"Yes, not two inches from the other!" Germaine cried, leaning heavily upon the shoulder of the lieutenant. "I can't hold my pistol, but I can shoot with my left hand, though! The scoundrel! I never saw such luck!"

The soldier would not admit that it was skill, not chance, which had directed the course of the ball.

"Pick up the pistol and give it to me in my left hand," he continued. "I am afraid to stoop, for I am getting terribly weak."

"Hadn't you better let the thing go, now?" Perkins asked. The lieutenant was not of his superior officer's opinion. He did not believe that accident had sent two balls within an inch of each other through the fleshy part of the major's arm; a spot evidently selected that the soldier might be disabled and yet not mortally wounded. He now thought Montana to be one of those wonderful marksmen, occasionally met with on the vast plains

of the frontier—men who seem to shoot by instinct, who, seemingly, take no aim, yet drive the ball home to the mark every time.

"Give me the pistol! I'll kill him yet!" gasped the major, in blind, impotent rage.

Perkins never troubled himself to argue with angry men; he simply regarded it as a waste of time; so he picked the pistol up, put it into the major's left hand, and retired in haste, while the major proceeded to take aim.

Then a sudden change came over Montana's face, and he cried aloud in his clear, deep voice:

"Major Germaine, twice now I have spared your life when I could have taken it as easily as to wound you in the arm, but I don't want to kill you; I want no man's blood on my soul! You have called me a rascal—a gambling thief! You have tried to mark me, and now I'll mark you so that all the world that see you once will know you again!"

Germaine in a great rage fired, but, as was only to be expected, the bullet flew wide of the mark.

Montana's fire answered the soldier's.

The major groaned, staggered and fell; he had fainted; the people clustered around him. Montana's bullet had cut away the lobe of the right ear!

The miner had indeed marked the major for life.

The "shooting-match" was over.

## CHAPTER XL

### A STRANGE ACCUSATION.

AFTER the "shooting-match" was over, Montana and Hallowell started directly for their home, although they had considerable trouble in getting away from the enthusiastic miners who were highly delighted at the success of their champion, and were extremely anxious to celebrate the victory by draining flowing bowls of potent "p'ison" within the classic precincts of the clubhouse until the stars grew tired of winking and "jocund day walked tip-toe o'er the misty mountain tops," as Colonel Baltimore Bowie beautifully expressed it.

But Montana, politely and firmly declining the honor, fairly tore himself away, and with his partner started up the road for the West Gulch.

The twain passed beyond the limits of the town.

The big round moon with its lusty light shone o'er the scene.

"You'll have to keep your eyes open now," Hallowell observed, thoughtfully, as they walked along. "That fellow will do you a mischief if he can."

"Better an open enemy than a secret one. It is the unknown foe striking in the dark that I fear," was his partner's response.

As the words left the miner's lips, a dark form rose suddenly from behind the shelter of a giant boulder by the wayside—arose almost within arm's length of the two and so unexpected that both men jumped back and grasped their weapons.

No friend was apt to lay in wait in such a manner, but a second glance revealed to the two friends that the dark figure was clad in womanly guise.

It was a woman, attired in a dark "waterproof" cloak, the hood drawn carefully over her face, thus completely concealing her features.

"A word with you, Montana," she said, the voice low and tremulous.

Montana, man of ice with a will of iron, simply nodded his head, but Hallowell, believing that he had recognized the speaker, was astonished—so astonished that he simply stood and stared with open mouth at the cloaked figure.

"Alone, please," added the woman, impatiently.

"I presume you will oblige the lady?" Montana remarked, perceiving that Hallowell was motionless with amazement.

"Oh, yes, sartin," the big friend responded, evidently still laboring under the effects of the surprise. "In course, anything to oblige. I'll wait for you at the turn of the road," he continued, addressing his partner, and then he inclined his head profoundly to the lady, "Good-evening, ma'am."

The tall son of Maine was in a state of great amazement as he walked slowly up the road, leaving the woman and Montana together.

"Well, durn my cats!" he muttered, "ef this here partner of mine don't take the hull caboodle of 'em fur all they're worth. Furst it's one, then it's t'other. I reckon if this here sort o' thing goes on much longer we'll have the pair of them clawing each other next; and that all-fired cuss, too, takes it jest as cool as a cucumber! I wonder which one of the two he's goin' to hang on to? The leetle one is playing mighty spunky. I reckon that she's heered 'bout t'other one, and means to make Montana show his colors. Ginerally it's the fellers that run after the gals, but in this case, the boot's on the other leg. Durn me! if I thought the leetle critter would have tried it on so bold, though she was allers so shy; but, when a gal gits it bad, they're a heap sight worse than us he-males!"

Hallowell passed on up the road, turned to the right around the bend, and his tall figure disappeared from the view of the watching pair.

"Step this way, please," said the woman, in her clear, sweet voice. "Behind the boulder we shall be sheltered from observation if any one should chance to pass along the road."

"Certainly," the miner replied, cool and collected as he was wont to be.

The twain passed around the boulder to the east and the giant rock completely concealed them from observation.

Face to face the two stood, within arm's length of each other,



and the broad, bright beam of the moon gave ample light for the interview.

With an impatient motion the woman pushed back the hood of the cloak from her face, exposing to view the pale, pretty features of Mercedes Kirkley.

Montana was not surprised at the sight, for he had recognized the girl by her voice when she had first spoken.

"Montana—William Jones, or whatever you call yourself, you have been near death to-night!"

Wildly, impulsively, the girl spoke, and every nerve within her pretty body seemed to be trembling with excitement.

The miner was decidedly more astonished by this peculiar speech than he had been by the unexpected appearance of the girl, but he replied on the instant.

"We are always near to death in this world."

"And if your life had been suddenly cut short by the bullet of Major Germaine, in your dying hour would not your mind be racked by the thoughts of a bitter wrong done to a weak and foolish woman—a wrong which has not been atoned for?"

The brows of the miner contracted just a bit and the muscles of the mouth grew stern.

"You talk in riddles—explain," he said, coldly.

"A single name does that—Juliet Oaks!"

Montana fairly started, and a look of profound amazement swept over his pale features.

"Juliet Oaks!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Juliet Oaks, the woman, weak and foolish, entrapped by the arts—which you know so well how to use—from her home and friends; who turned her back on everything that a woman holds most dear, who fled, like a thief in the night, from the little Illinois village to join you here in Deadwood, but who was overtaken by the vengeance of heaven whose laws she had outraged, and found a grave on the lonely prairie, instead of a life of guilty happiness with you!"

"And how comes it that you know aught of Juliet Oaks?"

Montana asked, evidently much amazed

"I am her half-sister," Mercedes answered. "Our mother had two husbands. Juliet was ten years older than I. She and my father, her stepfather, did not agree, and when she was eighteen she ran away from home—we lived in Chicago then—and went as a teacher to the village in lower Illinois, where you made her acquaintance; there, after a time she married, and within two years after that marriage she met you; her husband was absent; she did not love him, but married him simply because she was tired of supporting herself. You won her from her duty and she fled, carrying her child with her. Stricken with an illness that she feared might prove fatal—as it did in time—from Cheyenne she wrote to me, the first letter that I had received from her since her flight from home, with the single exception of the answer which she sent to my letter announcing the death of her mother and stepfather, both of which events occurred within the limits of a single week. In the letter she wrote the story of her life, told of her marriage, the birth of her child, her temptation and her sin. She wrote as one might write believing that death's dark angel was near. She feared that she would not survive the journey to Deadwood, and therefore she implored me to hasten to her. She instructed me to stop at a certain hotel in Cheyenne, and there receive instructions how to reach her. I came on at once. At the Cheyenne hotel I found a small trunk which had been left behind by her, but no letter. I waited a week and then came on to Deadwood. I feared the worst, and therefore I confided to no one the fact that I was a half-sister of the woman for whom I was inquiring so anxiously. In time I learned that Juliet had died on the journey, but could procure no tidings whatever of the child. Then I examined the trunk, thinking that perhaps I could gain a clue there to the name of the man for whom my poor unfortunate sister had forsaken home and friends. There were a few articles of clothing in the trunk, and among them a simple letter—a letter signed Robert Peyton, and dated at Cheyenne."

Loud and clear was the girl's voice, and her manner plainly indicated that she expected Montana would be affected by the knowledge possessed by her, but the face of the miner never changed.

The girl merely paused to take breath and then proceeded with her speech, evidently laboring under great excitement.

"The letter was brief, only stating that, so far, the writer had not found a spot likely to suit, but that as soon as he had done so, he would instantly send for her. That letter was in your handwriting; you are Robert Peyton, the betrayer of my sister!"

## CHAPTER XII

JABEZ Z. SMITH AGAIN.

A PECULIAR, sad look was upon Montana's face as he met unshrinkingly the gaze of the girl. Certainly he did not seem at all like a guilty man; or, if he was one, he had sufficient nerve to look his accuser square in the eye.

"You are the man!" cried Mercedes, impulsively. "It is of no use to deny the truth. I felt sure that you were Robert Peyton the first time I saw you."

"And why were you sure?" Montana asked, in his quiet way.

"I do not know—I cannot tell that!" the girl exclaimed, hurriedly, and in evident confusion.

Just a little bit of a smile curled the corners of the miner's mouth. It was plain that he was not much alarmed.

"And so, just because you have taken into your head that I am the man whom your sister was journeying to Deadwood to meet, it must be so, eh?"

"No, no!" cried Mercedes, indignantly. "I have better proof than a woman's whim. Did I not tell you that I have your letter to my sister, written from Cheyenne?"

"And how do you know that it is my letter?" he demanded.

"Because it is your handwriting."

"And what do you know about my handwriting?" questioned the miner, in astonishment. "You have never seen it."

"Oh, yes, I have!" Mercedes answered quickly.

"You have?"

Montana was astonished.

"Yes; what else can one do in this world but meet cunning with cunning? I was sure that you were Robert Peyton the first time my eyes ever rested on your face, but I was determined to be sure, and now I am. The events of to-night determined me to the course I have pursued. I resolved to bring you to an explanation. You are a reckless, daring man; you hold your life as lightly as though it were something that could be had for the asking. You are liable to be cut off at any moment, liable to die with the secret of the whereabouts of my sister's child locked in your breast."

Montana's pale face grew paler still as he listened to the girl's words, and Mercedes' keen eyes, eagerly watching his face, saw that her words had produced an impression.

"Oh, speak, Montana!" Mercedes cried, using, by mere force of habit, the old familiar name. "You know not how soon your account with this world may be closed. Give me the child; it is nothing to you; I will give it a mother's care!"

"And the father?" asked the miner, suddenly; "has he no claim? Will he not come forward some day and demand his child?"

"No one knows whether he is living or dead," the girl answered. "In her letter to me, written just after she had received the intelligence of the death of her mother, she said that she and her husband had separated, and that she never expected to see him again; that she had applied for a divorce, and expected that it would be granted in a few days. I understand now why she was so eager for a divorce; then I had no suspicion of the truth."

"Do you know the name of your sister's husband?" Montana asked, abruptly.

"No, she never mentioned his name. She merely said that she was tired of supporting herself, and had married, but in the marriage had made a mistake, and that after a time she had separated from her husband."

"And that was all, eh?"

"Yes, all."

"Suppose I deny the truth of this assertion which you have just made?" he asked, slowly—"that I am the man you think me?"

"With truth you cannot!" she exclaimed, firmly. "Here is your old letter; you will not deny that your hand traced the words?"

And from her pocket she drew a well-worn letter, bearing evident marks of age.

Montana took the paper, and by the light of the moon examined it, and as he did so a sigh escaped his lips. How the mind of the cold, silent miner went back to the time when he had penned the brief note, and then again there rose before him the bright visions which had filled his thoughts in those old, old days.

"It is like my hand," he said.

"It is your writing!" she replied, firmly, "and here is another letter which came into my possession by accident, written, too, by you, but in a disguised hand."

Montana's eyes sparkled strangely, as he looked upon the stained and patched letter which she held up to view.

It was the letter with which the bullwhacker had endeavored to light his cigar in Mercedes' shop, and which the nimble fingers of the girl had taken from the great, clumsy hands; the name of Juliet Oaks had met her eyes, and, overjoyed at the clue, which had come into her possession in such a strange manner, she had easily persuaded the Pet of the Niobrara to take another cigar-lighter.

"When I read this letter, which came into my possession without my seeking it, I saw that fate was determined not to allow you to escape me. Listen," she continued:

"MY DEAR C.:

"Your favor was duly received. Much obliged for the information, but I need not trouble myself about the matter. Juliet Oaks is dead and in her grave. The party on the trail is, beyond a doubt, the person I need most to fear, but I have covered the matter up so carefully that it will be impossible for any one to discover me. Even Juliet knew me under another name from the one I now bear. These women always bring mischief in their train, but in my case a miracle alone could put this party on the right scent."

"The mine is doing well at present, but we mustn't be too eager to push things, or else the bottom will tumble out of the whole concern."

"Yours in haste,

"JABEZ Z. SMITH."

Montana listened attentively, and if the man's mind could be correctly read in his face, not only was the letter new to him, but was also a puzzle.

"It is useless to deny the truth!" Mercedes exclaimed, impetuously. "This letter is yours; the mine mentioned is the little Montana; you know where my sister's child is; give her to me, and I will never trouble you more."

"What a queer world this is, isn't it, Mercedes?" Montana asked, gloomily, for the first time in his life addressing her by her first name. "Here for the last three months you and I have been making eyes at each other, I—poor fool that I am! liking you more and more each day, and dreaming, too, at times, that the liking was returned; dreaming also that if the fancy was true, from the product of the Little Montana, I could fit up a home where, after my long life of perilous adventure, I could



find peace and rest at last, and now, lo and behold! my bark runs on a rock and I am shipwrecked right in sight of port. All the time you were seeking me as the bloodhound seeks the fleeing slave in the Eastern jungles; your eyes, wherein I thought I read the light of love's true passion, were but setting snares to entangle my stumbling feet. For your sake this Major Germaine seeks my life—for your sake I have stood up, faced his revolver's mouth, risked my life against his and proved the conqueror. For you I fought, Mercedes, and now that the laurels of victory are in my grasp they wither and fade in my hands."

"Montana!" cried Mercedes, her face cold and pale, her lips trembling, and her voice uncertain, "no matter what the feeling is in my heart for you, as sure as I stand here a living, breathing girl I would crush it out even though my heart should break rather than own as my lord and master the wretch who lured my poor sister to disgrace and death!"

For a moment the miner looked in the face of the passionate girl—a peculiar glitter in his dark eyes.

"Brave words, Mercedes," he said at last, with measured accent.

"They shall be true ones even though the struggle kills me!" the girl replied.

"Mercedes, I will answer the question that you have asked," Montana said, abruptly. "I know nothing of the child of Juliet Oaks, know not whether she is living or dead. I deny that I am the man you think me, although at present it is better that I should not attempt to explain. In time you will know the truth."

"Oh, if I could only believe you!" the girl exclaimed, passionately.

"Perhaps you will in time, and now, good-night; it is late, and if you should be seen here with me Deadwood would have ample food for gossip."

"Good-night!"

And Mercedes hurried away, her bosom torn by conflicting passions.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### TWO LOVES FOR ONE HEART.

THE morning which succeeded the night upon which the shooting-match had taken place came bright and beautiful.

As usual Mercedes was in her shop. The girl looked pale and careworn; little sleep had visited her couch during the preceding night. Over and over again in her uneasy slumbers she had re-enacted her part in the interview with the miner, Montana.

Vainly pretty Mercedes wrestled with the truth. She loved the miner—loved the man whom she had learned to despise and hate long before she had ever set eyes upon his face; but, as she had stoutly said, she would not yield to the passion even to save her heart from breaking.

Brave words! as Montana had truly cried, but oh! who but a gentle and loving woman could understand how terrible was the agony endured by the girl.

She had sought the society of the miner. At first she had persuaded herself that she was only anxious to ascertain whether her surmise was truth or false—whether Montana was the man to whom her sister had fled, or whether the belief which had taken root in her fancy was but an idle whim, born of nothing.

Extremely sensitive was Mercedes.

She had been impressed with Montana at first sight. Such a man she could love, and was not this sudden and unaccountable fancy—for Mercedes, with her sister's sad career ever before her, was not a girl likely to believe much in love, which, as she truly said, presaged only misery and suffering to her—was not this strange and peculiar liking for an unknown man a proof that he was the person she sought—her sister's destroyer?

Juliet was her sister; Juliet had been fascinated; was she, Mercedes, not likely to feel the influence of the power which had proved so terrible in its force to one so closely allied to her in blood?

A subtle question, and one not likely to hatch in any brain but that of a young, romantic and morbid-minded girl.

The discovery, too, that the miner's handwriting—which innocent, big-hearted Lige Hallowell had procured for her without having the slightest suspicion that his act was akin to digging a pitfall wherein Montana should be trapped—was exactly identical with that in the letter bearing the signature of Robert Peyton, confirmed her suspicions.

And so Mercedes continued on in her task. She had registered a vow to find and care for her sister's child; that vow must be kept at all hazards. She felt that she was strong; this terrible man who had ruined her sister's life should never cast a spell over her, "charm he ever so wisely;" but, face to face with him, the ice broken, the accusation made and received, and guileless Mercedes found that she had—if not overtaken her powers, strained them to their fullest extent.

She had dallied too long with the snare; her own feet were entangled in the mesh wherein she had intended to trap Montana only.

She would conquer; she would crush this foolish love for the man so unworthy of her, but oh! what a struggle it would be—what pain it would cost!

She must forget this foolish passion; forget pleasant-voiced, pleasant-faced Montana; banish forever the memory of the happy hours which they had spent together; the hours during which, she foolishly thought that she was scheming skillfully to betray the miner, but when the snare was sprung she found that she alone was prisoner.

The opening of the store door disturbed the girl's sad meditations, and she rose to attend to the customer.

It was a woman!

A woman dressed, too, as few women had ever dressed in the streets of Deadwood; for, until Miss Dianora Campbell's appearance, the latest fashions of the "rich East" had shone in the infant metropolis of the Black Hills only in the monthly journals, and few indeed of them found their way from the line of the iron-way at Cheyenne to the fastness of the Black Hills.

Mercedes, totally unsuspecting of Miss Campbell's errand, although she knew well enough who she was, rose to receive her with a placid face.

The girl knew the father, the Congressman, only too well, for, during a visit to some friends who resided in the same village that the hog-butcher honored with his "villa," she had become acquainted with him and had been so annoyed at his persistent attentions that in despair she had fled back to Chicago to escape from them.

Miss Campbell surveyed the pretty store-keeper with a critical stare.

"Humph! and this is the little red-eyed, sallow thing that is to rival me!" she murmured, under her breath.

And in truth Mercedes looked her worst that morning; but when a girl weeps nearly all the livelong night one can scarcely expect to behold her blooming like a rose-bud, newly bathed in dew, in the morning.

"You are Miss Mercedes Kirkley?" Dianora asked, in her haughty, arrogant way.

The tone put the girl upon her guard at once.

Leave these girls alone for finding each other out. Just this little, simple question told Mercedes that Miss Campbell was no friend to her.

"That is my name, miss," she replied.

"Madam, if you please; I am a married woman," the stranger observed, her manner haughty and disagreeable.

"I beg your pardon for the mistake," Mercedes remarked, with chilling politeness. "I trust that I have not offended you beyond endurance by the error?"

Dianora felt that she was getting rather the worst of it and therefore she retorted, angrily:

"I'll trouble you, young lady, to be more respectful when you speak to me, do you understand?"

"The door is right behind you there; if you don't like my ways you had better walk out," Mercedes answered, with cool indifference.

Dianora lost her temper.

"Girl, I have come to talk to you kindly!" she exclaimed. "I have come solely to save you from making yourself the jest and sport of all this town; not that I care two straws for you, either one way or the other, but my name is likely to be mixed up in the matter, and I do not wish to have such a thing happen!"

Mercedes gazed at Miss Campbell in profound astonishment; the offensive manner was unnoticed in amazement at the words.

"Oh, you needn't stare!" Dianora continued. "You know what I mean, well enough, or, if you don't, it is time you did."

"I do not understand at all," Mercedes hastened to say.

"Well, as I said before, it is time you did!" Dianora replied, contemptuously. "Oh, I understand all about it; I know everything! I saw you last night after the trouble was over leave this shop to meet him!"

And then, all in an instant, the woman's meaning flashed upon the girl. This haughty young woman referred to her interview with Montana.

"Yes," continued Dianora, "I knew that you visited him at the mine in the West Gulch pretty often, but I had no idea that you would steal out under cover of the night to hold an interview with him; but, my own eyes convinced me, and now I tell you the matter has gone far enough, and it must be stopped. I will not submit to it any longer!"

"Submit to what?" cried Mercedes, thoroughly astonished.

"Why, this open and undisguised love-affair with my husband."

"Your husband!" Mercedes could hardly believe the evidence of her own ears.

"Yes, my husband!" Dianora repeated, firmly. "Montana—William Jones, as he now calls himself; my husband, to whom I was married in Chicago, Robert Peyton! Do you doubt my word? Here is the marriage certificate!"

And Dianora produced the document, yellow with age, and displayed it before Mercedes' astonished eyes.

There was no mistaking the genuineness of the certificate.

"And now that you know he is my property I'll trouble you to let him alone!" And then Dianora, with the air of a queen, swept out of the little shop, leaving Mercedes speechless with astonishment.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### THE BULLWHACKER RISES TO EXPLAIN.

NEVER was there a girl more astonished!

Robert Peyton—Montana—the husband of Dianora Campbell! And he had been the lover of her sister, too! What was the meaning of this mystery?

No recent marriage, either, for the certificate was evidently old with age. Mercedes had not noticed the date, but it was clear to her that the marriage could not have transpired since the death of Juliet.

What manner of man, then, was this Montana—this Robert Peyton—for there was no doubt now that Montana was indeed Robert Peyton—to have two love affairs at the same time, and



endeavor, too, now to secure her affections, knowing full well that his own wife was living?

Could it be possible that he was such a base villain.

He certainly did not show it in his face.

In utter perplexity Mercedes resumed her seat, her mind filled with vague and strange apprehensions.

The darker the clouds gathered about the head of Montana, the more she felt she loved him; it was a fatal passion: whither could it lead but to sin and shame?

Mercedes' meditations were rudely and abruptly interrupted, for the door opened suddenly and a frowsy, unkempt head, surmounted by a battered-up old silk hat, made its appearance.

"Skin me fur a bufler-robe ef this hyer ain't the very iden'ical shanty!" and then into the shop walked the Boss Bullwhacker of Shian.

"Howdy? Reckon I see you, marm!" continued the giant, ducking his head in a sociable sort of way. "I 'specks you remember me; Bludsoe—Jimmus Bludsoe, own cousin to the engineer of the Per-a-rie Belle, 'an' I'll keep her nozzle ag'in' the bank till the last galoot's ashore!" That's me, marm, that's my platform to a ha'r. Never say die as long as thar's a mule left that kin shake a leg! Say, mebbe you remember me a-tradin' with you for some cigars t'other day?"

"Yes, sir, I remember it," and she remembered perfectly well, too, the letter which she had obtained from him.

"Wa-al, you leetle she-woman, you've got me into a heap of deficulty!" the giant gravely announced.

"Yes?"

"Durn my ole mule's left leg! ef 'tain't so!" Mr. Bludsoe replied. "Mebbe you remember that I tried to git up a trade with you."

"Yes, sir, I believe so."

"An' you wouldn't have it; no idee of fun 'bout you women folk, anyway; but you can't help it; natur' fixed it; all you're fit fur is to cook slapjacks an' bile inions an' sich like. Wa-al! as I were a-sayin', we traded—fur cash—solid basis, reg'lar ole hard time rocks, an' when I went fur to light my cheroot, I were a-gwine to use an ole looter, but you fotched me a reg'lar lighter instead."

"Yes, sir."

"Wa-al, now, ma'am, the question afore the meetin' is, w'ar is that air durned ole letter?"

"The letter—" said Mercedes, slowly, reluctant to yield her prize.

"Yes, ma'am, that's the p'int we're heading fur! The fact of the matter is, thar's bin a heap o' row kicked up about that 'tarnal ole 'pistle. You see, ma'am, I was with a few of the boys, enjoyin' myself like a gentl'man, in the Big Horn saloon, when I happened jes' by accident to show t'other ole letter. You must know, marm, I found these hyer two letters a piece down on the per-a-rie; they war jes' a-lyin' on the sile, sayin' nothin' to nobody, an' I picked them up. The flaps of the envelopes war open—rain did it, they say now—durn me ef I know, or care either. I thought that they had been heaved away by some pilgrim, an' I jes' stuck 'em in my pocket without thinkin'. Wa-al, I slung one of 'em away in hyer t'other day, an' as I sed, I pulled t'other one out o' my pocket up inter the saloon, an' that little beast of a Paddywhacker—that air Paddy Pud, you know, the Irisher that pulls the reins over the express hack—durn the man wot drives hosses when thar's good muels able to kick a fly offen their ears with their hind hoofs to be had! Wa-al! that little Irish galoot—I speak respectfully of him, 'kase I courted a Dublin gal onc't—me an' her split 'kase she sed her ha'r was auburn, when it was redder'n thunder, an' I couldn't go sich nonsense—wa-al, the minit he see'd the letter, he jumped at me like a durned ole bull-terrier, an' sed he, he sed, 'See hyer, byes, this is the baste that robs the mail, bad 'cess to him, Silver Sam!' As I sed afore, marm, I'm kinder partial to the Patlanders on account of that cook with the red ha'r, an' so I didn't kill the little cuss, but jest slung him playfully through the winder—I calculate I'll owe ole Dick Skelly 'bout ten dollars fur that air glass that was smashed fur the next ten years, although I offered fur to go outside an' fight him like a man fur to see who should squar' the damage. Wa-al, the long an' the short of the matter is, that them air two letters were stolen outen the mail by this hyer Silver Samuel, whoever he is, durned ef I know! an' they sw'ar that they'll hang me fur highway robbery ef I don't bring them back."

Mercedes produced the letter very reluctantly; she was loth to part with it, although it would have puzzled her to have told what possible use it could be to her.

She believed that Montana had written the lines, although he had disguised his hand so that it was almost impossible to recognize it; but still it was just possible that he had not written the letter.

Then a bright idea occurred to the girl.

"The letter was torn in two so I pasted it together," she said.

"It is only written on one side; it doesn't make any difference."

"Oh, no, in course not."

"It is written by a Mr. Jabez Smith," she observed, glancing at the signature as if she had noticed it for the first time. "Was the other letter so signed?"

"No, marm, that ole store-keeper cuss, Tommy Black writ it."

"And does Mr. Smith claim this letter?"

The bullwhacker looked astonished.

"Smith! who in thunder's he?"

"I don't know; don't you?"

"Smith, Smith!" muttered Bludsoe, reflectively. "Unkim mon namel reckon I don't know any Smith in Deadwood."

"And who claims the letter, then?"

"Why, the ole post-office galoot, Tommy Black."

"And what right has he to another man's letter?" Mercedes

questioned. "You see, the envelope is destroyed. If I were you I should not give the letter up except to Mr. Smith in person."

"Wa-al, now, that is kinder hoss-sense, isn't it?" remarked the bullwhacker, musingly.

"Let Mr. Smith—there is his name plainly signed Jabez Z. Smith—let him come forward and claim his letter."

"Ke-rect, by thunder! an' when he does come, by Cain, he'll have to treat or fight! Durn my wagon-tops ef I'm gwine to tote ary man's letters round in my pockets for nothin'! I ain't a post-office, nor an express-hack, by a jugfull! Ef it hadn't 'a' bin fur that red-haired gal I'd eat that Paddywhack fur sarcin' me, though he smells strong enuff of whisky fur to answer fur a sign fur any distillery in the hull durned Illinois country. Wa-al, marm, I'm much obliged to you," and the bullwhacker opened the door to depart, when a sudden thought occurred to him. "Say, ef this hyer Smith stands the drinks I'll do what I kin fur you, seein' that you can't ring in; I'll come back an' toss up with you fur the biggest hunk of tobacco that you've got in the hull durned shanty."

And then the giant proceeded direct to the post-office.

Quite a little crowd were congregated in the store, it being the general lounging place of the town during the daytime.

In marched the bullwhacker, the letter in his hand.

"Hyar I am, an' hyer's the 'pistle! Now, trot out Mister Jabez Z. Smith, an' lemme get a look at the animile!"

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### WHO IS SMITH?

"YES, sir-ee, now I'm talkin'! You hear me, pilgrims? Bludsoe am I, the Boss Bullwhacker of Shian, the long-horned, tough-wooled, cavortin' mountain sheep of the ole mountain range, baa-a! Whar is Smith—Jabez is the fore-front of his name, an' Z. is the mule-chain that j'ines the two together!" cried the Pet of the Niobrara, vociferously.

The miners congregated in the post-office looked at each other the name was not familiar to them.

"Smith," said one, reflectively.

"Smith!" quoth old General Baltimore Bowie, who chanced to be present; "strange cognomen! Have we a Smith among us, fellow-citizens?"

"Heaps of 'em!" answered another free and independent voter.

"The woods air full of 'em!" suggested a third.

"But Jabez Z., that's the man I hunger for!" roared the bullwhacker, boisterously.

"I don't know of any such man in the town," the postmaster remarked. "The best thing for you to do is to seal the letter up, address it to Mr. Smith, and put it in the post-office here; then he will be sure to get it."

"Oh, no, I guess not!" cried Mr. Bludsoe, winking mysteriously at the crowd. "This hyer letter is valuable, now, I tell yer! I kin read, I kin, I reckon that I didn't go to school fur nothin' onc't! I was a member of the furst society way back in ole Kentucky, now, I'm a-tellin' you. I driv' the stage from Maysville to Paris fur years when I was nothin' but a kid. Oh, I was one of the sports. You jes' ask round Mount Sterling or the Blue Licks; I reckon that you'll hear a heap 'bout a gentl'man 'bout my size—a feller w'ot looks like me!"

"You had better leave the letter with me," Black again suggested, "or you may get into trouble. This Mr. Smith won't like to have you show his private letter all over town."

"Get inter trouble!" howled the bullwhacker, now fairly beside himself with delight. "Why, you ole lead-mule of the post-office team, you 'call' me—you 'call' me an' I slaps down a 'full hand,' an' that's the kind of man I am! Get inter trouble! Why, that's my platform! Whar is this hyer Smith? trot him out, an' if he says two words to me 'bout his durned ole letter skin me fur raw-hides ef I don't make him eat it; yes, you bet! chew it, too, as ef he liked it! That's the kind of a crow-bar I am! Say! will somebody in the crowd jes' have the kindness to bite my left ear, or throw a cud of terbaccer in my right eye, or pull the left-hand lock on the thumb-hand side of my head? Oh, I'm jes' spilin' fur some fun! Whar is Smith, or anybody that looks like Smith, durned ef I—"

"Hallo! here comes Montana!" cried a wag near the door.

"Wa-al, gents, I guess you'll have to excuse me!" ejaculated the giant, suddenly, and backing toward the rear door as he spoke. "I can't be with you always, you know. I've got to meet a note fur seventeen thousand dollars at twelve. Ta, ta; see you ag'in, so-long!" And then the boasting bullwhacker vanished through the rear door of the store just as the miner entered the front one.

Naturally there was a burst of laughter at the expense of the retreating blusterer, and the miner, entering in the midst of the merriment, inquired the cause.

The story of the mysterious letter which Bludsoe had pronounced to be of such value was told to him, but he, knowing the character of the Shian pet so well, merely laughed and remarked that he "reckoned" that the writer of the letter, whoever he might be, wouldn't worry much about it.

And all that day the Pet of the Niobrara pranced from one saloon to another, displaying the letter in each and every place; inquired loudly for one Jabez Smith, and hinted mysteriously of the important contents of the "pistle," as he generally termed it.

But no Jabez Z. Smith stepped forward to claim his letter up to the time that evening shades fell upon the "magic city." Not only that, but no one in the town had ever heard of any man bearing such an appellation, although as one loud-spoken miner had remarked: the shades below were full of Smiths, and a good



many more could be spared and wouldn't be missed from this breathing world.

From nightfall until about nine o'clock the bullwhacker's tall form was missed from the classic shades of the Deadwood shanties, but, right after that time, he suddenly appeared as large as life and twice as natural, as he would have expressed it.

He had been lying off in French Kate's shebang, one of the vilest haunts in the town, saloon and dance-house combined.

The bullwhacker's capacity for liquor was something to be wondered at, but that afternoon he had succeeded in overtaking his strength, and, overcome by the potent fumes of the fragrant "bug-juice," he had gone fast to sleep in a chair in French Kate's place, and had remained there undisturbed, for the "Madame," as Kate was usually called, rather admired the sublime impudence of the mule-driver, and as trade was slack and the room not needed, she had allowed him to remain in peace.

From French Kate's Bludsoe had started straight for Johnny's shebang, which, as the reader will probably remember—if he has allowed so unimportant a fact to remain within his recollection—was situated right on the outskirts of the town.

The night was dark, the moon not yet being fairly up, and just before coming to the den of evil repute the way ran through some scrub pines. A more lonely spot could not have been found for miles around, and yet it was within a few hundred yards of the town.

Bludsoe's head was not as clear as it might have been, and his walk was decidedly unsteady as he entered the little clump of pines.

"Durn my lead mule's right-hand tail!" he exclaimed, as he caught his toe against a good-sized bowlder and tumbled over it; "it's as cussed dark as three black cats up a blind alley chased by the Jack o' spades!"

And then, suddenly, from behind one of the scrubby pines stepped a tall, dark form.

The straggling rays of the feeble moonlight, struggling through the dark clouds overhead, gleamed fitfully upon the shining tube of a revolver, glistening in the stranger's hand, and leveled full at the breast of the bullwhacker.

"Throw up your hands, pilgrim, or thar'll be one mule-driver less in Deadwood in a min'tel!" cried a hoarse voice.

Bludsoe recognized the situation at once.

"I pass, stranger; pull light on that air trigger, for durn me if I want to start a graveyard hyer!" the bullwhacker cried.

And Mr. Bludsoe elevated his hands with a gentle grace that was really charming.

"How are you fixed?" inquired the road-agent, thus evincing a solicitude in regard to the financial condition of the man-from-Shian, that was truly delightful, considering that the questioner was an entire stranger.

"Broke," responded Bludsoe, tersely.

"Is that so?"

"Fact! if mines were sellin' fur ten dollars apiece I ain't got just enuff to buy a smell."

"Any other valuables?"

"Six-shooters."

"Don't want 'em; they'll do for you to raise a stake on to get out of town."

"Wa-al, I'm much obliged!" exclaimed Bludsoe, touched by this delicate consideration.

"Didn't I heer somethin' 'bout some valuable document—a letter or sich like that you were a-cavortin' round town with to-day, or was I a-dreamin'?" remarked the "gentleman of the night."

"Oh!" cried Bludsoe, struck with a sudden idea, "mebbe you're Mister Jabez Z. Smith?"

"I reckon I'll answer fur him; so hand it over."

Vainly the giant searched his pockets; no letter could he find.

"Lost it?" asked the disguised man.

"Durn it, no!" Bludsoe cried. "I had it when I went to sleep. Somebody's a-bin a-goin' through me!"

"Whar did you go to sleep?"

"In French Kate's; durn her ole green cat eyes! she's levied on that air letter!"

"It's all right; I'll call on her myself, so-long! Jest oblege me by turning your back for a few min'tes."

"Hol' on! who air you?"

"Silver Sam! sc-long!"

And then the road-agent vanished amid the pines, leaving Bludsoe to swear at his evil fortune.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### WAR DECLARED.

MONTANA completed his purchases at the store and started immediately for home. He had been compelled to come into town to replace some tools which had unexpectedly got out of order.

Soon with his rapid, tireless stride he left the town behind, passed the bend in the road and then came face to face with the man he least desired to see—the hog-butcher—capitalist—Congressman, Mr. Mortimer Campbell.

That gentleman evidently bound for the West Gulch had sat down upon a bowlder for a moment to rest; during late years the representative of Illinoisian Egypt had grown quite fleshy.

"Hallo!" cried Campbell, looking up as Montana came so unexpectedly around the bend. "Well, if this isn't luck! You are Mr. William Jones of the Little Montana mine, I take it?"

"Yes, sir," replied Montana, in his cold, distant way.

"I was jest on my way to take a look at your mine, Mr. Jones."

"I kinder had a sort of an idea of investin' in it."

"Well, if that is your object, you may spare yourself the trouble of looking at the mine, for it isn't for sale," Montana replied, curtly.

"Thunder! I reckon, young man, that you don't own the hull mine, do ye?" cried Campbell, getting red in the face; he was losing his temper.

"I reckon that I own the controlling interest!" the miner replied, sharply: "and, furthermore, I want you to understand that you can't buy a single foot of that mine without my consent. I discovered the property, and when I took a partner in I took care to have the papers fixed so that I could still control the mine."

"Oh, we can fix the papers, easy enough!" Campbell cried, roughly and overbearingly. "I reckon that you ain't got any lawyers round hyer smart enough to draw any papers that I can't git another lawyer to pick holes in. If your partner is willing to sell I'll have you pitched out, neck and crop, if you're anyways saucy!"

"Oh, you will!" and Montana fairly laughed in the face of the bloated Congressman.

"Yes, I will!"

"I'll bet you a hundred dollars that you won't, and put the money up, too!" Montana exclaimed, defiantly.

"Well, we'll see!" Campbell returned, rising.

"Yes, we will see!"

"I reckon, young man, that you don't know who I am!" the Congressman exclaimed, attempting to look dignified.

"Oh, yes, I do, you contemptible old rascal!" the miner replied, indignantly.

"What?" Campbell fairly yelled, red with rage.

"Oh, I know you like a book, Mortimer Campbell, from Egypt, Illinois, drover, hog-butcher, politician, Congressman, the robber of the widow and the orphan, the man whose word is worthless and whose bond is as bad as his word! Oh, I know you! Not a single foot of the Little Montana property shall you ever own while I live!"

"I'll have that mine now if it costs me a hundred thousand dollars!" exclaimed Campbell, in a rage, shaking his fist at the miner who laughed in his face.

"It will cost you more than that! It will cost you your life!" and Montana's eyes glittered ominously.

And from the look upon the other's face it was quite evident that Campbell was thoroughly in earnest.

"Oho! we'll see about that!" he retorted. "I know more about you than you think for, and if it wasn't for my daughter's sake I'd make it hot for you, Robert Peyton."

"What are you talking about now?" demanded Montana, contemptuously.

"Oh, you can't bluff me off! I understand that game as well as you do. Why have you changed your name? What are you doing here under a false one? Honest men don't generally change their names!"

"First prove that I am Robert Peyton and then I'll talk to you."

"You are my daughter's husband, and she intends to claim you, too!"

"When she gets me, just let me know, will you?"

"I tell you, young man, you have no idee of the things I've got in store for you if I find that you're inclined to be obstinate," Campbell said, in warning. "There's a doubt about your title to the Little Montana mine. I've had a lawyer looking into the matter."

"It seems to me that you are mighty anxious to buy that defective title!" Montana retorted.

"Then there's Major Germaine; he'll make this town too hot to hold you afore you're a month older unless you have powerful backing."

"Meaning yourself, eh?"

"Well, I reckon my influence would be worth something."

"Mighty little!"

"Well, you'll see pretty soon. You kin have war if you want it!" Campbell declared.

"That is exactly what I want."

"You'll get it now, but you'd make a heap more by being sensible and going in cahoots with me. Why, we could make a big thing out of the mine; everybody says it's a good one and only needs capital to develop it. I'll find that; we kin get your partner out of the way, he don't amount to shucks, anyhow! We could organize a joint stock company, get out shares, you know, have the mine 'salted,' stick a lot of tremendous rich ore in, you understand, get some of them Eastern experts for to come on and examine it—a ten or twenty thousand dollar fee would fix one or two of them professors so that they would assay a grindstun at the rate of two hundred dollars to the ton—then we kin put the stock on the market, buy a big newspaper or two to boost the thing up for awhile, sell the hull concern out for a big figure and then slide out afore the crash comes! Why, man alive! there's a hundred thousand dollars apiece in the thing jest as easy as turn your hand over! I wouldn't make you the offer if my Dianora wasn't so struck arter you, but she's jest made up her mind to have you and I know her too well to attempt to git her out of the idee. Come, young man; it is the biggest chance that you ever had in your life! Why, there ain't one man out of ten thousand that wouldn't jump at the offer."

Campbell paused to take breath. Montana had listened to the unfolding of the scheme with a cynical smile upon his handsome features—a smile wherein contempt was strongly written.

"Mr. Congressman Campbell, unfortunately for you I am that one man picked out of ten thousand, and I would see you and your rascally plans in blazes before I would consent to it!" Montana replied, firmly.



Campbell fairly gasped with amazement. The refusal was entirely beyond his comprehension. Refuse the chance to make a hundred thousand dollars? Wonderful!

"Why, you must be crazy to refuse a hundred thousand dollars. I'll make the hull thing myself if you don't go in."

"You forget that you haven't got the Little Montana yet, and while I live you are never likely to get it!" said Montana, with prompt decision.

"See hyer! we're too strong for you!" Campbell cried, in warning.

"That remains to be seen."

"The major and I will go in together; we'll run you out of the town as sure as shooting!" Campbell exclaimed, threateningly.

"Count the cost before you commence the job!" Montana retorted, defiantly. "We are not now in Illinois where you can fee lawyers, buy judges and bribe jurors, but here in the wilds of the Black Hills, where each man is a law unto himself and the rugged miner scorns the legal trickery of civilization. The Little Montana property is mine, and I'll hold it at the muzzle of the revolver against any force that you can bring. Pick out your coffin, Campbell, and make your will, before you try to throw me out of the Little Montana!" And with this bold defiance the miner passed on, leaving Campbell crimson with rage.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### A CLUE AT LAST.

It was about ten o'clock and the "fun" in French Kate's place was at its height.

The dance-house was generally pretty well patronized in the evening although usually deserted during the day.

From ten at night to two the next morning the crowd was always the greatest, met "to chase the hours with flying feet," music's dulcet strains being furnished by an aged Dutchman, who 'jist rasped thunder outen a fiddle!" to use the Deadwood parlance.

The fat son of the Rhine-land also acted as master of ceremonies and called out the figures for the dance, some of which were extremely peculiar to the Far West.

"Hands all round mit yer bartners!" he would yell. "General lemonade mit all of you! Waltz mit your bartners up to de bar an' treats de leedies—twenty-five der trink, an' den take bartners for de bolka! of you blease!"

And this was the way things were conducted. After every dance the miners were expected to escort their "bartners" up to the bar and treat them to a flowing bowl.

There was no standing upon ceremony; no waiting for introduction. You picked out any disengaged "lady," said, "Will you dance, marm?" and the thing was done; or, if you happened to be new to the scene, and a little bashful, and looked as if you would "pan" out well in the matter of drinks, the "lady" picked you out.

"Come, young man, don't take root!" the bold-faced huzzy would exclaim. "The next is a waltz, an' I waltz divinely. I don't take a back seat at waltzing for anybody in the Black Hills. I'm the Pet of Deadwood, I am!"

And what free and open-hearted son of toil could resist such an appeal.

There were more quarrels to the square inch in French Kate's place than in all the rest of the saloons in Deadwood put together.

It can hardly be believed that sensible men—many of them with good, pure sisters and mothers in the far East, and some few of them possessed of toiling, honest wives, would quarrel in regard to the smiles of these wolf-hearted, painted huzzies, the human warders to the gate of hell, but it was so. Hardly a week passed without some difficulty between two men in regard to their claims for some one of the girls.

And blood, priceless human blood! was shed that these human ghoulds might live!

But the quarrel rarely ever transpired inside the saloon.

French Kate, a tall, brawny woman, with a face as hard as though cut out of a pine-knot, and with arms stout and muscular as a prize-fighter's, was ever on the watch.

The moment a quarrel commenced she grasped a heavy bludgeon, which she kept behind the bar, ready for such emergencies, and rushed into the midst of the trouble.

"Get out of this!" she would cry; "you can't fight in my place. Go outside if you want to quarrel!"

And woe betide the unlucky wight who attempted to resist her commands.

Many a bully, primed with the potent bug-juice, had proudly proclaimed himself a chief of note, and danced up and down the street without finding any one eager to dispute his claims to lord it over the multitude, then had straggled into French Kate's, eager for fresh worlds to conquer, and, disregarding the declaration of that "gentle" lady that he had better make himself scarce, had proceeded to utter his war-cry; without further words suddenly assaulted he would be by the masculine Kate, well whacked with the cudgel and driven out into the street a pretty well-used-up man.

As many a miner had tersely expressed it, "Kate was a team on the war-path!"

As we have said, the hour of ten was at hand, and the fun was going on bravely, when the entrance of a new-comer into the saloon attracted the quick eyes of the mistress of the place, and her face, usually hard and forbidding, looked more ugly than ever.

The new comer wore the blue of Uncle Sam, and that he was no

stranger to the saloon was apparent from the looks exchanged between the girls.

Kate stepped forward at once to accost the soldier, who was leaning idly up against the door-post, watching the scene.

"Well, what do you want here?" asked the mistress of the place, abruptly, as she approached the new comer.

The soldier was no stranger to our readers, for bould O'Toole the great, looked exactly the same as he did on the day when he had accosted Montana on the mountain road.

"Bad 'cess to yer manners!" said O'Toole, indignantly, "is that the way ye spake to a gintleman an' a customer?"

"See here! I don't want your custom!" Kate retorted, abruptly "and your room is a great deal better than your company!"

"An' phat did I liver do to yees?" the soldier questioned, in indignant innocence.

"Oh, what did you do?" cried the mistress of the shanty, holy. "Didn't you smash ten dollars' worth of glasses and bottles, you ugly Irish beast, you!"

"An' phat was the raison? Wasn't me life in danger? Is it to be murdered I am entirely widout a struggle?" the soldier demanded. "Be the sowl of me grandfather's ould cat! it's black an' blue I am now from the whacks ye gave me wid that illigant stick of yours. It's a mumber of the softer sex ye air, but I'll go bail that ye'll bate any man of your size in Deadwood!"

"I'll beat you if you've come here to kick up any disturbance!" Kate persisted, warmly. "Why can't you behave yourself like a gentl'man? What good does it do you to kick up a row an' break things, I'd like to know?"

"Shure, I'm not goin' to be after kickin' up any row."

"Oh, I know you!" snarled Kate. "Every time you come into the place you get into a fight an' break things, an' I ain't a-goin' to stand it! Now, you just git out!"

"Oh, hol it's a foine sight of airs ye're after putting on, Miss French Kate!" retorted the Irishman. "Mebbe ye're so rich that ye don't care for customers."

"No, not customers like you," was Kate's tart reply. "Your money is good enough, an' I like you well enough when you're all right; but it don't pay me to have you come in here, spend a dollar or two, an' end off by kicking up such a row that all the rest of my customers are frightened out of the place."

"Oh, be aisy, or if ye can't be aisy, be as aisy as ye kin!" commanded the Irishman grandiloquently. "I come on business to-night, and it's a wee bit of information I want out of you."

"Information—about what?" demanded the virago, in astonishment.

"There was a bullwhacker in here this afternoon."

"Mebbe there was; wot of it?"

Kate was on her guard in an instant.

"How about a bit of a letther ye took from him?"

"Who says I took it?"

"Oh, I know you did, Kate; phat's the use of beatin' about the bush? Ye know ye took it."

"Was it of any value to anybody?" asked the woman, sharply.

"Shure, you know whether it was or not—ye read it!"

"Who says I did?"

"It's the natural curiosity of the female sex; ye couldn't help r'ading it, ye know ye couldn't!"

"Well, wot of it, anyway?"

"I'm 'ager to know who put ye up to take that letther, an' phat ye did with it?"

"It didn't belong to the bullwhacker, anyway; he said so before he went to sleep, and said, too, that he was hunting round after the owner of it."

"Aha! an' the owner came to you for it, eh?"

"Yes, he did."

"An' you gave it to him?"

"Of course, an' he paid me five dollars for my trouble like a gentl'man."

"An' who was he?"

"Mr. Smith. He was all muffled up, I never saw him before, an' reckon I wouldn't know him again."

"An' how did ye know that he was the owner of the letther?"

"Why, he wrote his name to prove it, see!" and Kate displayed the signature, Jabez Z. Smith, on a card.

"Five dollars for that card, Miss Kate, if you plazel!"

The Irishman had recognized the handwriting.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### A COMPLETE SURPRISE.

MONTANA, under the broiling rays of the hot noonday sun, was busily engaged in the mine.

Hallowell had taken his gun and strolled off up the gulch intending to try for some game.

He had been gone some time and Montana was expecting each instant to hear his heavy tread coming down the gulch, when the sound of horses' hoofs fell upon his ears; a few seconds after a little squad of soldiers, thirteen in number, a sergeant and twelve privates, came round the bend in the glade.

The troop came along at a slow trot until they reached Montana's side; then the sergeant gave the command to halt.

"How are ye?" he said, nodding to the miner.

Montana was slightly acquainted with the soldier, who did not bear the best of characters, having been engaged in several disgraceful brawls since his appearance in Deadwood.

"Giving the horses some exercise?" Montana asked.

"No, after deserters; we got wind of a fellow skulking around up in this quarter; seen any one?"

"No one; I rather guess, sergeant, that you're on a false



scent. I hav'n't seen any strangers in these parts for some time."

"I guess the information was all right; the cuss probably keeps himself pretty well hid, an', mebbe, is working in some of the mines round hyer."

"That's possible," Montana admitted, "although I hav'n't heard of any stranger taking up his quarters round here lately."

"Say, Montana, I've got a leetle matter that I want to see you about," said the sergeant, dropping his voice mysteriously and urging his horse close to the side of the miner. Then he leaned over in the saddle and brought his mouth close to Montana's ear. "I don't keer about the men hearin' it, 'cos it might git me into trouble if it comes out that I interfered in the matter in any way; but you're a good squar' man and I want to put you on your guard."

"Well, I'm sure I'm much obliged to you," the miner replied. He guessed what was coming. The major had been threatening him.

"You know that little fuss you had with Major Germaine? Well, he's jes' as savage 'bout it as kin be, and he's going to make it hot for you the very first chance he gets."

"I shall be on my guard."

"And about this here Miss Kirkley," added the sergeant, still more mysteriously, "I kin put you up to a thing or two in that quarter; jes' bend your head over so I kin whisper in your ear."

The miner did so, although he did not believe that the communication would amount to much, yet he was desirous of hearing it, for he wished to know what the gossips of the town said about the matter.

"Well, you know the major is sweet on her, and she is—" the soldier paused, half-straightened himself in the saddle, and Montana naturally lifted his head to see why he paused.

And as he raised his eyes he caught the gleam of a revolver butt coming down impelled by all the force of the sergeant's arm.

Too late to dodge the blow! The ugly stroke took Montana full in the crown and floored him in a twinkling.

Half-stunned he essayed to rise, but the soldiers flinging themselves from their horses grappled with him, and, overpowered by superior numbers, his senses dazed too by the terrible blow, he was easily borne over on his back; then they lashed his wrists together with a stout lariat.

"What do you mean by this?" Montana gasped, getting breath at last.

"Didn't I tell you that we were arter deserters?" cried the sergeant, in triumph, "and you're the first one we've fastened to!"

"I'm no deserter!" cried the miner, astonished at the charge.

"Oh, we've got your description all right. Bill Curtan! Cut and run from Fort Laramie eighteen months ago. Oh! you're the man!"

"Where are you going to take me?"

The charge was such a ridiculous one that Montana felt very little anxiety about it; there would be no trouble about proving the mistake when he was brought before the proper officers.

"Now, Mr. Curtan, we'll jes' h'ist you up on one of these hosses and then you'll be fixed," the sergeant replied, evading the question.

A stout horse was brought, the miner was mounted on it, and a soldier also bestrode the same beast, sitting behind the prisoner. The sergeant was determined now that the prisoner was secured that he should have no chance to escape.

Then the procession rode off, the sergeant chuckling at the success of the ruse which had delivered stout Montana into his hands with only a semblance of a struggle.

"I told you I'd fix it!" the sergeant muttered, in triumph, to the soldier who rode next to him. "If we had given him a chance to use those fists of his'n, to say nothing of his revolvers, he would have given us a heap of trouble. He would have mashed one or two of our crowd sure, and, mebbe got away, arter all!"

On his part Montana was really puzzled by the strange affair. Was it a case of mistaken identity? Did the soldier really believe that he was the deserter for whom he was in search? or was it a deep-laid plan on the part of the discomfited major to remove him at any cost from his path? But, how could it be effected? He must be tried before the proper board of army officers. Major Germaine could not dispose of the case at his own sweet will. The men of Deadwood, too, were not children to be frightened at a name. They would demand and enforce justice. What then could his enemy gain by this move?

The whole affair was a profound mystery, and the more the miner reflected the more he was puzzled.

He smiled grimly, though, when a twinge of pain in his head recalled now and then the means which had been employed to capture him.

"They were wise," he murmured under his breath; "for I would have damaged some of them before they should have brought me to this, if I had only had half a chance."

And then Montana fell to speculating upon the excitement which his arrival in Deadwood in such a guise would create.

"A circus will be nothing to it!" he decided.

But instead of riding to Deadwood, the sergeant in command of the party knew a trick worth two of that.

The moment he got out of the West Gulch he made a wide sweep to the right, circled around the town, the smoke of whose chimneys could plainly be distinguished, and then took the trail leading southward.

The party did not intend to stop at the fort on the hillside at Deadwood apparently.

"Where are they taking me?" Montana asked of the soldier who rode behind him.

"Fort Laramie, I reckon."

A new idea then took possession of the mind of the miner. To reach Laramie—prove that he had been the victim of an unaccountable mistake, and then return to Deadwood would take some time—a week perhaps.

Was his arrest, then, a device of the major's to remove him from the Black Hills for a time that the soldier might be able to carry out some scheme which his presence would baffle?

Straight on the party rode until the sun sunk behind the far western hills, and the shades of evening began to gather thick and fast; they then came to a halt.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE TRAPPER ENTRAPPED.

THE sergeant had been extremely careful of his prisoner. He had not suffered the lashing around his wrists to be untied, and after supper had been dispatched, he had taken a second lariat and hopped the legs of Montana together.

About ten o'clock the soldiers began to prepare to retire for the night, and the sergeant paid a farewell visit to his prisoner.

"Do you s'pose you kin get out of this hyer scrape when you get to Laramie?"

"No doubt about it."

"Well, if you ain't the man, I don't see why Major Germaine was so durned anxious to h'ist you down to Fort Laramie."

"Oh, it was the major then that arranged this affair?"

"Certainly, I didn't know anything about it. He told me that you were a deserter from the United States service, and that I was to take a squad of a dozen men, arrest you—being careful not to give you any chance to knock us into a cocked hat—and run you off to Fort Laramie instantar; but that arter I got outside of Deadwood, I needn't trouble myself to travel fast; that if I took two weeks to get you to the fort, it would be money in my pocket when I got back."

"The whole affair is utterly ridiculous!" Montana exclaimed, impatiently. "Germaine knows well enough that I am no more a deserter than he is, and why he should wish to trump up this absurd accusation is a mystery to me."

"Well, it's pretty plain to me, Cap," the sergeant said, abruptly. "The major wants you out of Deadwood for a week or two, and, mebbe in that time he kin fix some matters which he couldn't do if you were to the fore."

"There may be something in that," Montana observed, thoughtfully.

"Say, Cap, how much will it be worth to you to be back in Deadwood?" asked the soldier, lowering his voice so as to be secure from eavesdroppers.

"Eh? I don't exactly understand?"

"Oh, I'm a good, squar' man, I am!" said the sergeant impressively. "Now, how much will you give if I fix it so that you kin slip out of here and dust back to Deadwood?"

"How can you arrange it?"

"Easy enough; I'll jes' loosen the lariats so that you kin slip out of them, then I'll take the picket post on the north side of the tent—that's whar the door is—myself. 'Bout midnight when you hear me commence to whistle, 'The girl I left behind me,' you'll know that the coast is clear; then you kin jes' slip out of the tent, git past me, I'll be in the bush so as not to see you, and hoof it to Deadwood as fast as you kin."

"I'll give you fifty dollars, all I have with me."

"It's a bargain!" the sergeant replied.

"Put your hand inside my coat; you'll find a secret pocket there with the money in it, and then if I reach Deadwood in safety I'll give you twenty-five more the first time I meet you there."

The sergeant possessed himself of the money and then loosened the lariats.

"Now mind, don't stir until you hear me whistle. And strike a bee-line right from the door of the tent due north. I'll see that thar sha'n't be any pickets in the way."

And then the sergeant withdrew, leaving Montana to his reflections, which were now far from being unpleasant ones.

Time passed rapidly; the pickets were thrown out for the night; and the rest of the command, stretching themselves out at full length upon the ground with their saddles for pillows, wooed the god of slumber.

And at the midnight hour all was still and quiet.

The moon, rising slowly, lighted the scene, and its broad, bright beams, shining down, fell upon the figure of the sergeant crouched behind a clump of bushes about forty feet from the door of the tent, a cocked revolving carbine grasped in his hand.

"Now I reckon that I'll take that leetle two hundred dollars that a certain party offered for the death of this hyer Montana!" he muttered.

And then, as coolly as though he was not about to commit a red-handed murder, he began to whistle, "The girl I left behind me," the favorite old English marching air.

Montana appeared at the door of the tent.

The sergeant took deliberate aim at the exposed figure, but even as his finger was about to press the trigger, right behind him rung out on the still air the blood-curdling yell of the Sioux warriors, and, startled by the sound, his aim was destroyed and the charge whistled harmlessly over the head of the miner.

And then came the rush of the red braves, led by Sitting Bull in person; the brief and bloody struggle; the slaughter of the entrapped soldiers, and the first man to feel the edge of the reeking scalping-knife was the sergeant, who had so coolly planned the murder of a helpless, trusting man.



CHAPTER XLIX.  
BROUGHT TO BAY.

MAJOR GERMAINE sat in his quarters; it was on the night following the one whereon the Sioux massacre had taken place in the valley below Deadwood.

Intelligence of the fearful tragedy had been brought by the stage which passed the spot early the next morning.

The wolves and carrion birds had made sad havoc with the remains, but as far as could be made out, thirteen men had been slain.

"Thirteen bodies," muttered the officer, as he pulled the ends of his mustache, nervously; "thirteen? There should have been fourteen! There were twelve men, the sergeant, and the prisoner."

And then the major's reflections were suddenly and rudely interrupted.

The door opened quickly and a tall figure clad in black glided into the room, closed the door dextrously behind him, a nickel-plated revolver gleaming in his hand.

The major sprung to his feet; he was taken completely at a disadvantage, his pistols being upon the table at the other end of the room.

"Sit down, major, and don't attempt to cry for help, or I shall be obliged to make a vacancy in the United States army," the stranger observed, coolly.

The soldier sunk back in his chair in profound amazement; the voice, though evidently disguised, was familiar to him.

"I've had considerable trouble to hunt you down, but I've got you at last," Silver Sam observed, for it was the road-agent in person. "I knew that you were in the town somewhere, but as the only clue I had to you was a little scrap of your writing, it has taken me some time to bring you to book."

"Carry back your mind, Major Germaine, to the little town in Illinois where you first met Juliet Oaks."

The face of the soldier became like marble as he listened to the words.

"I know no such person!" he cried, hastily.

"No, for she lives not in the flesh, but you did know her. She bore another name than Juliet Oaks when you first met her, for she was a married woman; her husband was away in the wilds of the West, striving to carve out a fortune for the woman who had married him simply that she might have a home. She met you—forgot the duty she owed to her husband and fled with you. You took her to Chicago; then you got a position in the army and was ordered to the West—to this post. You came, sent for her in time, but on her way to join you she died, and her bones now lie in the prairie soil."

"And who are you that know all these things?" cried the major, in astonishment.

"If I were like most men, I should call myself the avenger, and bid you prepare for death; but such a part I do not care to play. It has been a long and weary chase to hunt you down. I had no idea that you were the man, but when you went to French Kate in disguise and signed the name of Jabez Smith in order that you might possess yourself of the letter which she had—then you gave me a clue. The man I sent to find out why Kate took the letter from Bludsoe recognized your writing in an instant. And now, Major Germaine, though your life is in my hands, I spare it on one condition; the child of Juliet, where is she? The mother is in the grave, the child can be of no value to you."

"Why, the child died long ago," the major exclaimed, eager to get out of the scrape so easily. "She died on the first day of the journey from Cheyenne."

"My task is ended, then; and now, Major Germaine, a word at parting. Leave Deadwood within three days, or your life will not be worth an hour's purchase. You have fair warning; go!"

"And who will dare to put my life in jeopardy?" cried Germaine, hotly.

"I will!" cried the masked man, tearing away the false face, the huge mustache and the long hair.

The soldier's face turned deadly pale, and his lips were bloodless. Montana stood before him!

"Montana!" he cried.

"Robert Peyton, the husband of your victim, Juliet Oaks Peyton; and now, not satisfied with the ruin which you have wrought, seemingly, you have attempted to make the younger sister your prey."

"Is Mercedes Juliet's sister?" the soldier cried, in astonishment.

"She is, and she is not for you! Major Germaine, the world would justify me in killing you here on the spot, for you have attempted my life by the hands of a hired assassin. By a miracle I escaped the bullet of the man ambushed to slay me, and also escaped the scalping-knives of the red devils."

The soldier had little idea of the brother-hood-at-arms which united the great war-chief of the Sioux and the simple miner.

"Three days you are safe, from me—safe from my vengeance; but after that time look well to yourself, for if you remain in Deadwood, either you or I will die!"

And then, as suddenly as he had appeared, he retreated from the room.

The major had fully determined to go, and was speculating how he should be able to manage the matter; but the arrival of a courier from headquarters settled the question, for he was directed to transfer his forces to Fort Fetterman, leaving only a half a company in Deadwood to garrison the fort.

Sitting Bull's wild and bloody raid along the frontier had determined the general in command of the department to send a large force against the ruthless red chief.

But the major never led his command up the valley of the Rosebud in chase of the retreating Indians, for one morning Germaine suddenly disappeared, much to the astonishment of everybody. At first it was supposed that he had wandered off in the

darkness and had fallen into the hands of the Sioux, who were in strong force just outside the fort.

But in time the truth came out.

A Mr. Champion, one of the Government officials at Cheyenne, was detected by the secret service officers uttering base coins, and when fairly brought to bay, he confessed that Major Germaine and the old storekeeper, Black, at Deadwood, had been in league with him.

Champion the officials caught, but both the major and Black had made themselves scarce before the explosion came; they were too old birds to wait until the net was spread fairly over them.

CHAPTER L.  
SETTLING UP.

OUR brief, plain, round, unvarnished tale is told. Nothing now remains but to chronicle the final disposal of our characters.

After the major's departure from Deadwood, Montana took an early opportunity of explaining to Mercedes some of the events of his past life.

As Robert Peyton—his right name, by the way, which he had dropped upon coming to the Black Hills in search of the wife and child who had been spirited away from him, for fear that the author of all the wrong, whose name he knew not, might hear of him by accident, mistrust his purpose, and take measures to defeat it—a youth of twenty-one, he had married Dianora Campbell in Chicago. He had made her acquaintance by accident, had become fascinated by her bright beauty, and had married her; but, oh, how soon to wake to the knowledge that the proud and willful girl was utterly unworthy the love of any honest man, and he fled from her as from a deadly plague.

Years after he met Juliet Oaks. Again he fancied that he loved. Dianora he had neither seen nor heard of since the sudden close of the brief honeymoon in Chicago.

Whether she was alive or dead he knew not. It was an easy matter to procure an annulment of the tie which fettered him, and then, when once free again he married; Juliet Oaks, this time; and again, after a short period, he woke to the consciousness that a second time in the marriage lottery he had drawn a blank.

Then reverse of fortune came, and Peyton was obliged to leave his home, and seek a fresh start in the wilds of the far West.

In time he prospered; he wrote for his wife to join him, bringing with her the child which he had never seen. His letters remained unanswered. Then he wrote to some acquaintances in the town, and their replies told of the flight of his wife.

He traced the fugitives to Chicago, learned that the woman and child had been left behind there by the man who passed for the husband and father, and then after a time had journeyed West to join him.

Just a little scrap of a letter the anxious husband found after a thorough search of the rooms which the fugitives had occupied.

And that letter gave him a clue; they were Black Hillsward bound! Eager in the search the deserted husband had hurried on. At Cheyenne he discovered positive traces, and followed, hound-like, on the trail, until it led him to the lonely prairie grave of Juliet Oaks as detailed in the opening chapter of our story; from that point onward this story has followed the career of our hero closely.

Dianora was furious when she learned that Montana and Mercedes were about to be married, and did her best to get her father to worry Montana about the mine so that the marriage might be delayed, but, even old Campbell, with all his cunning, found that the principal owner of the Little Montana was fully a match for him, and so, after a while, the Congressman and his daughter shook the dust of the Black Hills from their feet and departed to try their fortunes elsewhere.

With Montana's marriage the fortunes of the mine seemed to take a fresh start; a new vein of ore was struck, richer than all the rest; hands were employed and a mill erected to work the ore, and among the workmen put on, was the redoubtable boss bullwhacker of Shian, the Pet of the Niobrara.

The old he-goat of the Big Horn mountain range swears by Montana and the Little Montana mine, and is always ready to either drink or fight with any two-legged critter who presumes to doubt that the Little Montana property isn't "the richest bit of sile this side of China!"

And as for Sitting Bull and his band of braves, are not their deeds written in crimson hue on the page of our nation's history?

Must we blame the savage warriors, robbed of their lands, driven from their hunting-grounds, cheated with lying treaties, deceived on every side?

Who among us would not choose with the savage chief when he asks whether it is better to starve to death like squaws on the reservation, or to boldly take the war-path and meet a chieftain's fate at the hands of gallant adversaries?

Still into the Black Hills flows the tide of civilization, and still Deadwood's magic city thrives and grows apace.

The days of '49 have come again, and men grow rich and poor in a single night.

But, let no vain hope of a fortune won without work tempt the Eastern lad to the Black Hills region. Incessant toil alone can win, and not many "strikes" are so fortunate as to tap a "Silver Sam" lode as the last great vein has been termed by Big Lige and long-haired Montana, the owners of the Little Montana mine.

THE END.



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